Kaṭha Upaṇiṣad
Dialogue with Death



From various authors & sources
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Kaṭha Upanishad

Chapter 1 Section 1

Naciketas and His Father

uśan ha vai vājaśravasaḥ sarva-vedasaṃ dadau ।
tasya ha naciketā nāma putra āsa ॥ 1 ॥

uśan = being desirous [of the rewards of the Viśvajit sacrifice]; *ha* and *vai* = equivalent to 'once upon a time'. *Vājaśrava* = he whose fame, is consequent on the giving of food, he *dadau* = gave away ; *sarva-vedasam* = all (his) wealth; *tasya* = of him; *āsa* = there was ; *ha* = as the story goes; *naciketā nāma putraḥ* = a son named Naciketas.

1. Desirous (of the fruit of the Vishva-jit sacrifice) Vajashravasa, they say, gave away all that he possessed. He had a son by name of Naciketas.

Commentary

At the time of this Upaniṣad, the sacrificial religion of the Brāhmaṇas was still popular. Desire for earthly and heavenly rewards was the prominent motive for all ritual activity (karma-khāṇḍa). The Upaniṣad leads us to a higher goal. *'He who is free from desire beholds Him.'* 2.20

Vājaśravasa gave way all that he possessed. — He is represented as making a voluntary surrender of all that he possessed, *sannyāsa*, in order to secure his spiritual interests.

Naciketas: lit. "one who does not know and therefore seeks to know."

Cp. R.V. 'No knowledge of the gods have I, a mortal.' *nāham devasya martyaś ciketa*.' X. 79. 5

The author of the Upaniṣad attempts to distinguish between Vājaśravasa, the protagonist of an external ceremonialism (*karma-khāṇḍa*), and Nāciketas, the seeker of spiritual wisdom (*jñāna-khāṇḍa*). Vājaśravasa represents orthodox religion and is devoted to its external superficial forms. He performs the sacrifice and makes gifts which are unworthy. The formalism and the hypocrisy of the father hurt the son.

taṃ ha kumāraṃ santaṃ dakṣiṇāsu nīyamānāsu śraddhā-'viveśa so'manyata ॥ 2 ॥

tam = into him, into Naciketā; *kumāraṃ santam* = while still a mere boy: *śraddhā* = faith (in the verity of the Scriptures), *āviveśa* = entered; *dakṣiṇāsu nīyāmāsu* = when gifts were being brought, [when cows meant for presents were being led separately, to the priests and the assembled Brāhmaṇas]; *saḥ* = he, (Naciketā); *amanyata* = thought.

2. As the gifts were being brought to the priests, faith entered him, although but a (mere) boy; he thought ……

Commentary

Sraddhā = faith. It is not blind belief but the kind of questioning which asks whether the outer performance without the living spirit is enough. Faith or rather 'conviction' arises from doubt and should be resolved using reason and logic and is the conviction that a certain practice will lead to the specific goal.

Prompted by the desire to do real good to his father, the boy felt worried about the nature of the presents he was giving away.

pītodakā jagdha-tṛṇā dugdha-dohā nirindriyāḥ |
anandā nāma te lokās tān sa gacchati tā dadat || 3 ||

The cows meant for presents to the Brāhmaṇas are being described:

Those by which *udakam* = water, has been *pītam* = drunk, are *pītodakaḥ;* those by which *tṛṇam* = grass, has been *jagdham* = eaten, are *jagdha-tṛṇam;* those whose *dohaḥ* = milk, has been *dugdhah* = milked, are *dugdha-dohaḥ* ; *nirindriyāḥ* = those that are devoid of the power of their organs, incapable of breeding; [i.e. the cows are decrepit and barren], *dadat* = giving ; *tāḥ* = those, *gacchati* = (he, the performer of sacrifice) goes; *tān* = to those (worlds); *anandā* = unhappy.

3. Their water drunk, their grass eaten, their milk milked, their strength spent; joyless, verily, are those worlds, to which he, who presents such (cows) goes.

Commentary

Nāciketas reveals here, with the enthusiasm of youth, the utter inadequacy of a formal selfless ritualism. The idea of complete surrender *(sarva-vedasam dadau)* in the first verse should be properly interpreted as utter dedication or complete self-giving.

True prayer and sacrifice are intended to bring the mind and will of the worshipper into harmony with the Universe and the Divine.

sa hovāca pitaram tāta kasmai mām dāsyasīti |
dvitīyam tṛtīyam tagum̐ hovāca mṛtyave tvā dadāmīti || 4 ||

saḥ, = he, approached his father ; and *uvāca ha* = said; *pitaram* = to the father. *Tāta* = O father; *kasmai* = to whom, to which of the priests; *mām dāsyasi* = will you offer me, that is to say, offer me as a present? Though ignored by his father; *dvitīyam trtīyam uvāca* = he spoke even a second time and a third time. Incensed at the thought, "This one is not behaving like a mere boy!" *uvāca ha* = said, *tam* = to him, *mṛtyave* = to Death, *dadāmi* = I give away; *tvā* = you, *iti* = this much.

4. He said to his father, "O Sire, to whom will you give me?" For a second and a third time (he repeated) (then the father) said to him, "Unto Death shall I give you!"

Commentary

As Vājaśravasa proposes to give away all his possessions, Nāciketas feels that this involves the giving away of the son also and so wishes to know about himself. When the father replies that he will give him to Yama, it may mean that, as a true sanyāsin, personal relations and claims have henceforward no meaning for him. Nāciketas takes his father's words literally. He in the course of his teaching points out that the psycho-physical vehicles animated by the ātman are determined by the law of karma and subject to death. He who knows himself as the ātman, and not as the psycho-physical vehicle becomes free and immortal.

bahūnām emi prathamo bahūnām emi madhyamaḥ |
kiggas svid yamasya kartavyam yan mayā'dya kariṣyati || 5 ||

bahūnām = among many — of many sons or disciples; *emi* = I go (rank); *prathamaḥ* = as first, that is to say, through the foremost conduct of a disciple etc. And *bahūnāṃ* = among many - many middling ones; *madhyamaḥ emi* = I move (count) as a middling one, I behave through the middling conduct. Though I am a son possessed of such quality, still my father has said to me, "To Death I shall offer you." *Kim svit* = what; *kartavyam* = purpose; *yamasya* = of Death-can there be; which purpose he (my father) *adya* = today; *kariṣyati* = will achieve; *mayā* = through me?

5. Naciketas [says] 'Of many (sons or disciples) I go as the first; of many, I go as the middling. What duty towards Yama that (my father has to accomplish) today, does he accomplish through me?'

Commentary

I go — Among many who are dead I am in the middle. I am not the last. Many others will still follow me and there is no need for lamentation.

Nāciketas in sadness reflects as to what help he has to render to Yama. There are three levels of disciplic attention:—

(1) Anticipating the teacher's or the parents' wishes and carrying them out is the way of the best pupils;

(2) promptly attending to what is ordered is the next best;

(3) neglecting the instruction and wishes is the worst form of conduct of pupils or children.

Nāciketas belonged to the first type; even at his worst he was never negligent of his duty to his father.

anupaśya yathā pūrve pratipaśya tathā'pare |
sasyam iva martyaḥ pacyate sasyam iva jāyate punaḥ || 6 ||

anu = successively, *paśya* = consider, have a look at; *yathā* = how; your, *pūrve* = forebears, etc. behaved. *Tathā* = similarly too; as *apare* = others - other sages behave; them also; you *prati-paśya* = consider; *martyah* = humans; *sasyam iva* = like corn, *pacyate* = decays and dies; and after dying, *punaḥ* = again; *sasyam iva jāyate* = reappears (is born) again like corn.

6. [Naciketas says to his father] "Consider how it was with the forefathers; behold how it is with those who've come later; a mortal ripens like corn, and like corn is born again".

Commentary

Thus what does one gain in this impermanent and transient world by breaking one's own promise? Be consistent to your own truth and send me to Yama. — This is the gist.

Nāciketas, startled by his father's words, reflected and told his father who was now apparently in a repentant mood, that he was much better than many sons, and there was nothing to be gained by going back on his word. Nāciketas reminds his father that neither his ancestors nor his contemporaries who were and are decent ever broke their word. After all, human life is at best transitory. Like a blade of grass one dies and is born again. Death is not the end; rebirth is a law of nature. The life of vegetation on which all other life depends passes through the seasonal round of birth, growth, maturity, decay, death and rebirth. The unity of all life suggests the application of this course to human beings also. This perpetual rebirth is not an escape from the wheel of becoming into a deathless eternity. Even if we do not gain life eternal, survival is inescapable. So Naciketas persuades his father to keep his word and send him to Yama's abode.



Nāciketas in the Abode of Yama

Vājaśravasa sent Nāciketas to the abode of Yama in order to keep his word. And having gone to Death's abode, Nāciketas waited there for three nights (i.e. days), Yama being out. When Yama returned from his trip, his councillors or wives said to him:

vaiśvānaraḥ praviśaty atithir brāhmaṇo gṛhān |
tasyaitāguṁ śāntiṃ kurvanti hara vaivasvatodakam || 7 ||

brāhmaṇaḥ = a Brāhmin; as *atithiḥ* = guest; *praviśati* = enters, like *vaiśvānaraḥ* = fire itself; as though burning *gṛhān* = the houses; *tasya* = for his sake - for the guest; *kurvanti* = accomplish: *etām* = this kind of; *śāntim* = propitiation - consisting in offering water for washing feet, a seat, etc., just as people do for allaying the conflagration of fire - and since evil consequences are declared in case of not doing so (Mu.1.ii.3), therefore *vaivasvata* = O Death; *hara* = carry, *udakam* = water - for Nāciketa for washing his feet.

7. "As a fire a Brahmana guest enters into houses and (the people) do him this peace-offering; bring water, O Son of the Sun"!

Commentary

As fire is appeased by water, so is a guest to be entertained with hospitality. The word for fire used here is *Vaiśvānara*, the universal fire, which affirms the unity of all life. The guest comes as the embodiment of the fundamental oneness of all beings.

In the Brāhmaṇa account, Naciketas goes to Yama's house, at the command of a divine voice. He waits for three nights before Death returns and shows him hospitality due to a guest.

āśā-pratīkṣe saṅgataguṁ sūnṛtāṃ ceṣṭā-pūrte putra-paśūggaś ca sarvān |
etad vṛṅkte puruśasyālpa-medhaso yasyānaśnan vasati brāhmaṇo gṛhe || 8 ||

āśā = is the hope for a desirable thing which is attainable though unknown; *pratīkṣa* = is expectation for something that is attainable and known; *saṅgatam* = the fruit derived from the association with spiritual people; *sūnṛta* = joy (in Vedic Sanskrit), 'kindly speech' in Jaina and later Brāhmanical works; *iṣṭam* = fruit produced by sacrifice, *pūrtam* = fruit resulting from such charitable works as planting gardens, etc. *putra-paśūṃśca* = sons and cattle; *sarvān etat* (*sarvam etat)* = all this; (he) *vṛṅkte* = excludes (from) i.e. destroys ; *puruṣasya alpa-medhasaḥ* = from (i.e. of) a person of little intelligence; *yasya* = in whose; *gṛhe* = house; *brāhmaṇaḥ* = a Brāhmana; *anaśnan* = not-eating,

fasting; *vasati* = abides. Therefore a guest should not be neglected under any condition. This is the idea.

8. Hope and expectation, companionship and joy, sacrifices (*iṣṭa*) and good works (*pūrte*), sons, cattle and all are taken away from a person of little understanding in whose house a Brahmin remains unfed.

Yama's address to Nāciketas

tisro rātrīr yad avātsīr gṛhe me 'naśnan brahman atithir namasyaḥ |
namaste'stu brahman svasti me'stu tasmāt prati trīn varān vṛṇīṣva || 9 ||

brahman = O Brāhmaṇa; *yat* = since; *avātsīḥ* = you have stayed; *gṛhe me* = in my house; *tisraḥ rātrīḥ* = for three nights; *anaśnan* = without eating, *atithiḥ* = a guest; and *namasyaḥ* = worthy of being saluted (venerable) as you are; therefore; *namaḥ te astu* = salutations be to you; *Brahman* = O Brāhmaṇa; *svasti* = let there be good fortune; *me* = for me; (through the aversion of the negative effects accruing); *tasmāt* = therefore, (from the lapse caused by your abiding in my house without food) *vṛṇīśva* = ask for; *trīn varān* = three boons —any particular three things you like; *prati* = one in respect of each night you have spent without food.

9. "Since you, a venerable guest, have stayed in my house without food for three nights, I make obeisance to you O Brahmana. May it be well with me. Therefore, in return, choose three boons".

Nāciketas's first wish

śānta-saṅkalpaḥ sumanā yathā syād vīta-manyur gautamo mā'bhi mṛtyo |
tvat-prasṛṣṭam mā'bhi vadet pratīta etat trayāṇāṃ prathamaṁ varaṁ vṛṇe || 10 ||

If you want to grant boons, then, *mṛtyo* = O Death; *yathā* = as; my father; *Gautamaḥ* (his clan-name) *syāt* = may become; *sumanaḥ*: = gracious, calm of mind; and also; *vīta-manyuḥ* = free from anger; *mā abhi* = towards me; *me abhivadet* = may talk to me; *tvat-prasṛṣṭam* = freed by you - sent home; *pratītah* = regaining his memory - i.e. recognising (me), *trayāṇāṃ* = of the three boons; *vṛṇe* = I ask for; *prathamam* = as the first boon; *etat* = this one that has this purpose, viz the satisfaction of my father.

10. That Gautama (my father) with allayed anxiety, with anger gone, may be gracious to me, O Death, and recognising me, greet me, when set free by you and this, I choose as the first gift of the three.

Commentary

śānta-saṅkalpaḥ — he whose mind is freed from the anxiety of — "how will my son behave after being sent by me to the abode of Death".

pratītah — "Favour me in such a way, that my father may not avoid me under the idea, that I have become a hungry ghost and should not be looked at! "

yathā purastād bhavitā pratīta auddālakir āruṇir mat-prasṛṣṭaḥ |
sukhaguṁ rātrīḥ śayitā vīta-manyus tvāṃ dadṛśivān mṛtyu-mukhāt pramuktam || 11

yathā purastāt = as before - the kind of affection that your father had towards you; *Auddālaki* refer to the same (person), and he is *Arunī* the son of Aruna; or he bears two family names: *pratītaḥ* = having recognised (you); *bhavitā* = will become possessed of, in that very same way: *mat-prasṛṣṭah* = being permitted by me; (your father) *śayitā* = will sleep; during *rātrīḥ* = nights other (future) nights too; *sukham* = happily with a composed mind; *vīta-manyuḥ* = free from anger; *tvāṃ dadṛśivān* = having seen you; *mṛtyu-mukhāt pramuktam* = as having been freed from the grasp of Death.

11. (Yama said): "Having, recognised you as before (your father) Auddālaki, the son of Aruna, will get over his anger and seeing you released from the jaws of death through my favour, he will sleep peacefully many a night."

Nāciketas's second wish

svarge loke na bhayaṁ kiñca nāsti na tatra tvaṁ na jarayā bibheti |
ubhe tīrtvā 'śanāyā pipāse śokātigo modate svarga-loke || 12 ||

svarge loke = in the heavenly world: *bhayam kiñcana na asti* = there is no fear whatsoever - fear arising from disease etc.; *tvam* = you, O Death; *na tatra* = are not there - you do not exert your influence there; *jarayā* = because of old age; *na bibheti* = nobody fears; *ubhe aśanāyā-pipāse-tīrtvā* = having transcended both hunger and thirst; *śokātigaḥ* = having crossed over sorrow - being free from mental stress; (one) *modate* = rejoices; *svarga-loke* = in the heavenly world.

12. [Naciketas said]:— "In the heavenly realm there is no fear whatever; you [O Death] are not there, nor does one fear old age. Transcending both hunger and thirst, leaving sorrow behind, one rejoices in the heavenly realm".

Commentary

Some commentators think that Nāciketas is here refering to the temporary realms of the devas attained through the performance of yajñas and good-works. Rāmānuja says that *svarga* here does not refer to the temporary heaven of Indra but rather to *mokṣa* — *svarga-śabdo mokṣa-sthāna-paraḥ*

sa tvam agniguṁ svargyam adhyeṣi mṛtyo prabrūhi taguṁ śraddadhānāya mahyam | svarga-lokā amṛtatvam bhajanta etad dvitīyena vṛṇe varena || 13 ||

mrtyo = O Death; since *saḥ tvam* = you, such as you are; *adhyeṣi* = remember, i.e. know; *svargyam agnim* = the Fire that is the means for the attainment of heaven - heaven that has the aforementioned qualities; (therefore) *tvam* = you; *prabrūhi* = speak; *mahyam śraddadānāya* = to me who am full of faith, and who desire heaven = (tell me of that Fire) by worshipping which; *svarga-lokā* = the dwellers of heaven, those who have reached heaven, the sacrificers; *bhajanta* = get ; *amṛtatvam* = immortality, divinity. That fact which is *etat* = this knowledge of Fire; *vṛṇe* = I seek for; *dvitīyena varena* = through the second boon.

13. You know O Death, that fire (meditation upon which) leads one to heaven. Describe it to me, who listens to you full of faith. Immortal are they who dwell in heaven — This I choose, as my second boon.

pra te bravīmi tad u me nibodha svargyam agniṁ naciketaḥ prajānan |
ananta lokāptim atho pratiṣṭhāṃ viddhi tvam etaṃ nihitaṃ guhāyām ||

Naciketas = O Naciketa; *te* = to you; *pra-bravīmi* = I shall say; *me* = from me; *nibodha* = listen with attention; *tat u* = that very thing, *svargyam agnim* = the Fire [meditation] that is the means for the attainment of heaven; I shall tell you, *prajānan* = being well aware of (it). That (Fire) which is *ananta-lokāptim* = the attainment of infinite world - viz heaven; *atho* = and also; *pratiṣṭhāṃ* = the support - of the universe in the form of Virāṭ (Cosmic Person) - *etam* = this Fire which is *nihita guhāyām* = abiding in the secret place (of the heart). The cave or the hiding-place is said to be in the centre of the chest - i.e. the heart

14. [Yama said]: "Knowing well as I do, that fire (meditation which) leads to heaven, I shall describe it to you — learn it from me, O Naciketas. Know that fire to be the means of attaining the spacious realm, as the support (of the universe) and as abiding in the secret place (of the heart)".

Commentary

The main purpose of this passage is to indicate that the ultimate consciousness of the universe is also the deepest part of our own inner being. See also I:2:12 It is one of the assumptions of the Upanisad sages that deep below the plane of our empirical imagination, will and feeling is one's ultimate being, one's true centre which remains unmoved and unchanged, even when on the surface we have the fleeting play of thoughts and emotions, hopes and desires. When we withdraw from the play of outward faculties, pass the divisions of discursive thought, we retreat into the Self, the witness within.

lokādim agniṃ tam uvāca tasmai yā iṣṭakā yāvatīr vā yathā vā |
sa cāpi tat pratyavadat yathoktam athāsya mṛtyuḥ punar evāha tuṣṭah || 15 ||

Tasmai = to him; [Yama raja] *uvāca* = spoke of; *tam lokādim agnim* = that Fire [that is being dealt with, which as Virat preceded the world - since it was the first embodied being;] *yā iṣṭakā* = the type of bricks, that are, to be collected (for the sacrificial altar); *yāvatīḥ vā,* = how many in number; *yathā vā* = or how the fire is to be arranged; *sa cāpi* = and he, [Naciketas, too]; *prati-avadat* = repeated verbatim; *tat* = all that; *yathoktam* = just as Yama had spoken; *atha* = then; *tuṣṭah* = being satisfied by his comprehension; *mṛtyuḥ* = Death; *punaḥ eva aha* = said over again.

15. [Yama] described to him that fire [ritual which is] the beginning of the world (as also) what kind of bricks (are to be used in building the sacrificial altar), how many and in what manner. And he (Naciketas) repeated all that just as it had been told; then, pleased with him, Death spoke again.

Commentary

Lokādi - the beginning of the world. In the R.V., Agni is identified with Praja-pati, the Creator, and so may be regarded as the source or Origin of the world. In II. 2. 9 we are told that the one Fire having entered the universe, assumed all forms. B.U. I. 2. 7. makes out that this fire is the *arka*, the worlds are its embodiment.'

Śaṅkara, however, interprets *lokādi* as first of the worlds, as the first embodied existence. *prathama-śarīritvād*. Cp. C.U. where it is said that all other things evolved from fire (*tejas*) which was itself the first product of essential being (*sat*).

> VI-8-4: 'Where could its root be apart from food? Even so, dear boy, with food as an offshoot, look for water as the root; with water as the offshoot, dear boy, look for heat as the root; with heat as the offshoot, dear boy, look for Being as the root. All these creatures, dear boy, have Being as their root, have Being as their abode, and have Being as their support.

The meditative technique that is taught here is a potent way of concentration for dissolving the ego-consciousness, which has a limited frame of self-reference and considers God as something far away above the skies. This also is, in one way, a *Saguna Upāsana*. Even to think everything together is a qualitative meditation; even if you entertain in your mind the consciousness of the whole creation, it is still *Saguna* only. This kind of meditation is supposed to make one reach the highest Creative Principle, Brahma-Loka, in the language of the Upanishad.

Personality can be of two kinds – one is the human personality; God appearing as a Huge Person sitting on the throne of Heaven, as is usually described by the religions of the world. Whenever we think of God we think of Him as some Person, filling all space. The other personality consciousness of the Ultimate Reality is as *Vaiśvānara*.

If this meditation, which is similar to the *Vaiśvanara Vidya* of the Chhandogya Up. becomes intense, you will no more be there as a meditator of the *fire* because of its all-

Inclusiveness. It is an All-Consuming Fire of consciousness and you will be reduced to the Fire Itself and it will lead us to *Sadyo Mukti;* you become liberated at once.

tam abravīt prīyamāṇo mahātmā varaṃ tavehādya dadāmi bhūyaḥ |
tavaiva nāmnā bhavitā'yam agniḥ sṛṅkāṃ cemām aneka-rūpāṁ gṛhāṇa || 16 ||

prīyamānaḥ = being delighted; *mahātmā* = the magnanimous One, [one who is not narrow-minded]; *tam* = to him; *abravīt* = said ; *iha* = here, [out of delight]; *tava* = for you; [a fourth boon]: *adya* = now; *dadāmi* = I offer; *bhūyaḥ* = again; *ayam agniḥ* = this fire ; *bhavitā* = will become [famous]; *tava eva nāmnāḥ* = by your name indeed; *ca* = moreover; *gṛhāṇa* = accept; *imām* = this; *sṛṅkāṁ* = necklace; *aneka-rūpāṁ* = multiformed and variegated.

16. The magnanimous one (Yama) extremely delighted, said to him (Naciketas) I give you here today another boon. By your own name will this fire become (known). Take also this multiformed necklace.

Commentary

Yama, being extremely delighted with the speed of learning which his pupil displays offers him another extra gift which is rather mysterious — *sṛṅkāṁ* — a chain. The word occurs again in I.2.3, where it means a road. *Sṛṅkā vitta-mayī* - the road that leads to wealth.

Śaṅkara proposes two meanings:—

(i) a literary one — *ratna-mayīm mālām,* simply a necklace of precious stones;

(ii) or a figurative one — *akutsitāṁ gatiṁ karma-mayīm*, the way of meritorious works which is productive of many different Karmic fruits. (*karma-vijjñānam aneka-phala-hetuvāt*).

In other words, Yama in addition to the meditative practice (jñāna yoga) Yama also introduces him to Karma-yoga — the path of Dedicated Action.

tri-nāciketas tribhir etya sandhiṁ tri-karma-kṛt tarati janma-mṛtyū |
brahma-jajñaṃ devam īḍyam viditvā nicāyye'māguṁ śāntim atyantam eti || 17 ||

sandhiṁ etya = becoming connected; *tribhiḥ* = with the three; *tri-nāciketaḥ* = one who has piled up the Naciketa fire thrice; *tri-karma-kṛt* = one, who undertakes three kinds of ritual activity; *tarati* = crosses over; *janma-mṛtyū* = birth and death. [Moreover], *viditvā* = knowing from scriptures; *brahma-jajñaṁ* = one that is born from Brahmā, ie. Hiraṇyagarbha is *brahmaja* (Virāṭ); and one who is enlightened, is *brahma-jajñaṁ* = for That (ie. Virāṭ) is ominiscient; [knowing that]; *devam* = deity, who is so called because of his effulgence; *īḍyam* = praiseworthy (adorable), (and) *nicāyya* = meditating on (that Virāṭ) - as one's own Self; (one) *eti* = gets; *imām* = this (tangible) ; *śāntim* = peace, cessation [from mental turmoil]; *atyantam* = thoroughly.

17. One who has thrice kindled the Naciketa fire, associating with the three, performs the three acts, crosses over birth and death. Knowing that which arises from Brahma, the omniscient, resplendent and adorable and realising that, one obtains this everlasting peace.

Commentary

One who has lit the Nāciketa fire thrice — this can mean having achieved perfection in this Vidya at least three times. Some commentators suggest it refers to the Vedāntic process of (a) learning about It (*śrāvanā*), (b) reflection on the teaching (*manana*) and (c) practicing what one has learnt (*nididhyāsana*).

Associating with the three — 'a number of interpretations can be given here:—

(a) mother, father, and guru, as valid sources of knowledge.

(b) Veda, smṛti and company of good people as a source of spiritual guidance,

(c) the *prastāna-trayam*, Gita, Upanishads and Brahma-sutras (although neither the Gītā nor the Brahma-sūtras were composed at the time of this Upaṇiṣad!)

(d) or attention to the three sources of valid knowledge — direct perception, inference, and scriptural testimony.

Performs the three acts — sacrifice, study and philanthropy (*ījya, adhyayana, dāna).*

brahma-jajña — the knower of the universe born of Brahmā — Agni, who is known as *jāta-vedas* or all-knower. Śaṅkara however, takes it as referring to Hiraṇya-garbha. For Rāmānuja, the individual jīva is Brahma-born. He who knows him and rules his behaviour is Iśvara.

Realising *that* in one's own personal experience one obtains *this* everlasting peace. It is the peace which is felt in one's own experience.

Two tendencies which characterise the thought of the Upanisads appear here, loyalty to tradition and the spirit of reform. We must repeat the rites and formulas in the way in which they were originally transmitted. These rules which derive their authority from their antiquity dominated men's minds. Innovations in the spirit are gradually introduced.

[The idea is that through a combination of meditation and ritual practice, one attains the state of *virāṭ*.]

tri-nāciketas trayaṁ etad viditvā ya evaṁ vidvaguṁś cinute nāciketaṁ |
sa mrtyu-pāśān purataḥ praṇodya śokātigo modate svarga-loke || 18 ||

viditvā = after knowing ; *etat trayam* = these three described earlier, *tri-nāciketas* = a performer of the 'Naciketa sacrifice thrice; and *yaḥ* = who; *evaṁ vidvaṁ* = having known the Fire (Virāṭ) thus - as identified with oneself; *cinute* = accomplishes; *nāciketaṁ* = the Nāciketa fire; performs the sacrifice called Nāciketa; *saḥ* = he; *praṇodya* = casting off; *mrtyu-pāśān* = the snares of Death -consisting in ignorance, selfish-desire, hatred, etc; *purataḥ* = even earlier - i.e. before death; *śokātigaḥ* = crossing over suffering - i.e. anxiety; *modate* = rejoices, *svarga-loke* = in heaven, in the world of Virāṭ, by becoming identified with It.

18. The wise one who has sacrificed thrice the Naciketas rite and who knows the three, and so knowing, performs meditation on fire, throws off first the bonds of death and overcoming sorrow, rejoices in the world of heaven.

eṣa te'gnir naciketaṣ svargyo yam avṛṇīthāḥ dvitīyena vareṇa |
etam agnim tavaiva pravakṣyanti janāsas tṛtīyaṁ varaṁ naciketo vṛṇīṣva || 19 ||

Naciketas = O Naciketas; *te* = to you; *eṣa* = this is; *svargyaḥ agniḥ* = the Fire that leads to heaven; *yam* = which; *dvitīyena vareṇa* = as the second boon; *janāsaḥ* = people; *pravakṣyanti* = will speak of; *etam agnim* = this Fire; *tava eva* = as yours [by your name]. [This is the fourth boon that I have willingly given]. *Naciketaḥ vṛṇīṣva* = O Naciketa ask for; *tṛtīyaṁ varaṁ* = the third boon.

19. This is your fire (sacrifice) O Naciketas, that leads to heaven, which you have chosen for the second boon. This fire (sacrifice) people will call by your name. Choose now, O Naciketas, the third boon.

Nāciketas' third wish

yeyam prete vicikitsā manuṣye 'stīty eke nāyam astīti caike |
etat vidyām anuśiṣṭas tvayā'ham varāṇām eṣa varas tṛtīya || 20 ||

yā iyam vicikitsā = this doubt, that arises; *prete manuṣye* = when a person dies; eke = some (say); *asti iti* = (It) the Self, exists; *ca eke* = and others (say); *ayam* = this [Self]; *na asti* = does not exist; *tvayā*

anuśiṣṭaḥ = being instructed by you; *aham* = I; *etat vidyām* = would know this; *varāṇām* = of all the boons; *eṣaḥ* = this one [is]; *varaḥ tṛtīyaḥ* = the third.

20. There is this doubt in regard to a person who has died, some say hit exists" and some say it does not exist". I would be instructed by you in this knowledge. Of all the boons, this is the third boon.

Commentary

Naciketas personally has no doubt about the survival of the Self after death as he has already said:— 'A mortal ripens like corn and like corn is born again' — His problem is about the ontological state of the liberated Self (*muktātma-svarūpa*).

Rāmānuja and Madhva say that *prete* means *mukte* or liberated. They formulate the question as:— "Some say that the liberated jīva is in a state of divine communion with the Lord, others say it is free from all qualities like knowledge etc. Some say that it is one with Paramātman others say that it will experience Brahman forever. I would like to know your conclusion."

Doubts about the nature of the liberated being are not peculiar to our age. In the B.Up. Yajñavalkya says; "the liberated Self, having passed beyond (*pretya*) has no more separate consciousness (*saṁjña*). It is dissolved in the Absolute consciousness as a lump of salt is dissolved in water. He justifies the absence of separate consciousness to his bewildered wife Maitreyi. 'Where everything has become the One Self, when and by what should we see, hear or think!' One who is liberated from the limitations of name and form, who has attained identity with the totality of being, cannot be said to exist in the ordinary sense. One is in that state not limited to a particular expression of consciousness; nor can one be said to be non-existent, for one has attained to real being (2:4.12-14).

The question repeatedly put to the Buddha is; "Does the Tathagata survive after death or does he not survive!' The Buddha refused to answer this question, holding that to say that he continues to exist would give rise to one kind of misunderstanding while to deny it would lead to another.

devair atrāpi vicikitsitam purā na hi suvijñeyam aṇur eṣa dharmaḥ ।
anyaṁ varaṁ naciketo vṛṇīśva mā moparotsīr ati mā sṛjainam ॥ 21 ॥

purā = in days of yore; *atra* = with regard to this thing; *vicikitsitam* = doubt was entertained; *devaiḥ api* = even by gods; *hi* = since; *eṣa dharmaḥ* = this principle called the Self; *na suvijñeyam* = is not easily comprehensible [to common people] *anuḥ* = it being so subtle and abstract. [Hence] *naciketaḥ* = O Naciketa; *vṛṇīśva* = you ask for; *anyaṁ varaṁ* = some other boon [- less complex]. *Mā uparotsīḥ* = do not press; *mā* = me [mā being the same as *mām* (me)]; *ati sṛja* = give up; *enam* = this one.

21. (Yama said): Even the gods of old had doubt on this point. It is not, indeed, easy to understand; (so) subtle is this truth. Choose another boon, O Naciketas. Do not press me. Release me from this.

devair atrāpi vicikitsitam kila tvaṁ ca mṛtyo yan na suvijñeyam āttha ।
vaktā cāsya tvādṛg-anyo na labhyo nānyo varas tulya etasya kaścit ॥ 22 ॥

atra = with regard to this thing; *devaiḥ api vicikitsitam kila* = indeed doubt was entertained even by the gods; *ca* = and; *mṛtyuḥ* = O Death; *yat* = since; *tvaṁ* = you; *āttha* = say; [that the reality of the Self]; *na suvijñeyam* = is not easily comprehended, [therefore this thing is unknowable even to the learned]; *vaktā ca asya* = and an instructor of this principle; *anyaḥ* = anyone else; *tvādṛk* = like you; *na labhyaḥ* = cannot be had; *na anyaḥ varaḥ* = there is no other boon; *kaścit* = whatsoever; which is; *etasya tulya* = comparable to this one [since all the other boons bear impermanent results].

22. (Naciketas said:) Indeed, even the gods had doubt about this, and you, O Death, say that it is not easy to understand. (Instruct me) for another teacher, like you, is not to be had. No other boon is comparable to this at all.

Commentary

The gods cannot have any doubts about the survival of the conscious Self after death; it is about the exact nature of the state of Liberation (*mokṣa*) which transcends the empirical state that there is uncertainty. Yama is here testing Naciketas to see whether he has a qualifications to receive this knowledge.

śatāyuṣah putra-pautrān vṛṇīśva bahūn paśūn hasti-hiraṇyam aśvān ।
bhūmer mahad-āyatanaṁ vṛṇīśva svayaṁ ca jīva śarado yāvad icchasi ॥ 23 ॥

vṛṇīśva = you ask for; *putra-pautrān* = sons and grandons; *śatāyuṣah* = gifted with a hundred years of life; *bahūn* = many; *paśūn* = animals, such as cows etc; *hasti-hiraṇyam* = elephants and gold; and *aśvān* = horses. Besides *vṛṇīśva* = ask for; *mahad-āyatanaṁ* = a vast expanse, habitat, region, a kingdom - *bhūmeḥ* = of the earth. [Furthermore, all this is useless if you yourself are short-lived. Therefore he says:—], *ca* = and, *svayaṁ* = you I yourself; *jīva* = live, with all the senses unimpaired; *śaradaḥ* = years; *yāvat icchasi* = as you wish to live.

23. (Yama said:) Choose sons and grandsons that shall live a hundred years, cattle in plenty, elephants, gold and horses. Choose vast expanses of land and life for yourself as many years as you will.

etat tulyam yadi manyase varaṁ vṛṇīṣva vittaṁ cira-jīvikāṁ ca ।
mahā-bhūmau naciketas tvam edhi kāmānāṁ tvā kāma-bhājaṁ karomi ॥ 24 ॥

naciketas = O Naciketas; *yadi* = if; *manyase* = you think that; *etat tulyam* = equal to this; *varaṁ vṛṇīśva* = please request that boon; *vittaṁ* = wealth; *ca* = and; *cira-jīvikaṁ* = longevity, *mahā-bhūmau* = vast tracts of land; *tvam* = you, *edhi* = become (prosper); *kāmānāṁ* = of all desirable things; *tvā kāma-bhājam karomi* = I will make you the enjoyer.

24. If you deem (any) boon like unto this, choose (that) as also wealth and long life. O Naciketas, prosper then on this vast earth. I will make you the enjoyer of your desires.

ye ye kāmā durlabhā martya-loke sarvān kāmāṁś chandataḥ prārthayasva ।
imā rāmāḥ sarathāḥ satūryā na hīdṛśā lambhanīyā manuṣyaiḥ ।
ābhir mat-prattābhiḥ paricārayasva naciketo maraṇam mā'nuprākṣīḥ ॥ 25 ॥

ye ye = all things; that are; *kāmāḥ* = desirable; *durlabhāḥ* = difficult to get ; *martya-loke* = in the human world; *sarvān kāmāṁ* = all those desirable things ; *prārthayasva* = ask for; *chandataḥ* = according to your choice, *imāḥ* = here are; the celestial nymphs - the *rāmāḥ* = (lit. women) who are so called because they delight (*ramayanti*) men; (and who are there); *sa-rathāḥ* = with chariots, *sa-tūryāḥ* = with musical instruments. *īdṛśāḥ* = such (women); *na hī lambhanīyāḥ* = are not surely to be had; *manuṣyaiḥ* = by mortals. *ābhiḥ* = by these - by these female attendants; *mat prattābhiḥ* = who are offered by me; *paricārayasva* = get (yourself) served; *naciketaḥ* = O Naciketā; *maraṇam* = of death; *mā anuprākṣīḥ* = do not inquire.

25. Whatever desires are hard to attain in this world of mortals, ask for all those desires at your will. Here are noble maidens with chariots and musical instruments: the like of them cannot be won by men. Be served by these whom I give to you. O Naciketas, (pray) ask not about death.

Commentary

The story of the temptation by Yama occurs for the first time in this Upanisad and not in the account in the Taittirya Brahmana. The temptation of Naciketas has points of similarity with that related of Gautama the Buddha. Naciketas is unmoved by the promises of transient pleasures and obtains from the god of death the secret of the knowledge of Brahman which carries with it the blessing of immortality. Gautama the Buddha also rejects the offers of Māra (Kāma-deva) in order to obtain true wisdom. There

is this difference, however, that while Yama, when once his reluctance is overcome, himself reveals the liberating truth to Naciketas, Māra is the "evil one", the perpetual tempter.

> śvo̱'bhāvā marty̍asya ya̱d ant̍akaitat sarv̍endriyā̱ṇāṁ ja̱ray̍anti tejaḥ |
> api̍ sarvaṁ jı̱̄vit̍aṁ alpam eva tavai̍va vā̱hās ta̱va nṛ̍tya-gīte || 26 ||

antaka = O Death; [who ends all, the enjoyable things you offer me are]; *śva-abhāvāḥ* = ephemeral, transient [whose existence ,(bhāva) is subject to the doubt as to whether they will exist or not tomorrow (śvaḥ); *jarayanti* = waste away; *tejaḥ* = the vigour; *yat* = that [there is]; *sarvendriyāṇāṁ* = of all the senses; *martyasya* = of a human being; *sarvaṁ api jīvitaṁ* = all life [even, that of Brahmā is]; *alpam eva* = short indeed; *vāhāḥ* = the vehicles etc; [and also]; *nṛtya-gīte* = the dances and songs; *tava eva* = yours alone - let them remain yours.

26. (Naciketas said:) O Death, ephemeral are all these, and they waste away the vigour of all the senses that a person has. All life, without exception, is short indeed. Let the vehicles be yours alone: let the dances and songs be yours.

Commentary

This verse affirms the view that everything that exists is fleeting and evanescent and has no substance. Vedanta Desikan taught that all forms of material pleasure and happiness and all material goals have seven defects known as *Sapta-doṣa* these are:—

1. *alpa* — their end results are trivial
2. *asthira* — they are transient and impermanent,
3. *asukara* — not easily obtained, they require much effort and are time consuming.
4. *asukhāvasāna* — ultimately ending in grief and disappointments.
5. *dukhānvita* — accompanied by disappointments and supported only by struggle.
6. *anucitam* — incompatible with our essential being.
7. *abhimāna-mūla* — they're based upon a false sense of self and lead to further perpetuation of this delusive sense of identity.

> na vi̱tten̍a ta̱rpaṇ̍īyo manuṣyo lapsyā̍mahe vitta̱m a̱drākṣm̍a cet tvā |
> jīvi̍ṣyāmo yā̱vad ī̍śiṣyasi tvaṁ va̱rast̍u me va̱ranīyaḥ sa eva || 27 ||

manuṣyaḥ; = people; *na tarpaṇīyaḥ* = cannot be satisfied; *vittena* = with wealth; *lapsyāmahe* = should we possible hanker after; *vittam* = wealth; *cet adrākṣma* = now that we have seen; *tvā* = you; *jīviṣyāmaḥ* = we live; *yāvat* = as long as; tvam — you; *īśiṣyasi* — (should rather be *iśiṣyase*); will rule [as the God of Death]? *varaḥ tu* = but the boon; *me varanīyaḥ* = which is worth requesting by me; *saḥ eva* = is that alone.

27. One can never be contented with wealth. Shall we enjoy prosperity when we have seen you? Let me live as long as you wish. That alone is (still) the boon chosen by me.

Commentary

All those things which we consider as securities in our lives are extremely fragile and ephemeral. Materialism places desire and consumption at the centre of life and sees happiness simply as the fulfilment of desires not recognising any value of a transcendental character. What is the value of wealth or long life, as they are all impermanent and unsubstantial? As long as the God of Death is in control we cannot fully enjoy wealth, power or life for the fear of separation from loved ones, loss of wealth and health etc. So Naciketas asks for self-knowledge, *atma-vijñānam*, which is beyond the power of death and not subject to loss or diminution.

Permanence till the dissolution of the primal elements is called immortality: *ābhūta-samplavaṁ sthānam amṛtatvaṁ hi bhāṣyate,* quoted in Vacaspati's Bhāmati 1.1.1.

What Naciketas and all the gods are doubtful about, is the state of liberation.

ajīryatām amṛtānām upetya jīryan martyaḥ kvadhaḥ sthaḥ prajānan ।
abhidhyāyan varṇa-rati-pramodān ati-dīrghe jīvite ko rameta ॥ 28 ॥

upetya = having come near to; *ajīryatām* = of the undecaying, of those who do not undergo the loss of age; *amṛtānām* = of the immortals (gods); (and) *prajānan* = knowing himself to be; *jīryan mart*yaḥ = subject to decrepitude and death; *kvadhasthaḥ* = living on the earth; *kaḥ* = who, [what sensible person]; *abhidhyāyan* = while deliberating [on the real nature of]; *varṇa-rati-pramodān* = music (colour), sex and entertainment [as transitory]; *rameta* = would delight; *ati-dīrghe jīvite* = in a long life ?

28. 'What mortal, slowly decaying here below, and knowing, after having approached them, the freedom from decay enjoyed by the immortals, would delight in a long life, after he has pondered on the pleasures which arise from music, sex and entertainment?'

Commentary

kvadhasthaḥ = living on the earth; the word is derived as follows; *ku* is the earth and it is *adhaḥ*, below, in relation to the sky and other regions; one who lives (*tiṣṭhati*) there is *kvadhasthaḥ*.

An alternative reading would be — *kva-tadāsthaḥ*; in which case the words are to be construed thus:— *tadāsthaḥ* is one who has *āsthā*, Absorption in, resorts to, with absorption (*teṣu*) in those, progeny etc; the phrase could then mean:—

"when will one, who wishes to achieve a goal higher than mere satisfaction of base desires, difficult though it is to secure, become *tadāsthā*, preoccupied with *that* goal?"

The idea is that nobody who knows the worthlessness of transitory pleasures will hanker after them. For every one naturally wants to evolve higher and higher up. Therefore one will not be seduced by the lure of progeny, wealth etc. Anyone who in the earthly realm has tasted the joys of spiritual life cannot be attracted by any aspect of material life of passion and greed. No one who has a foretaste of that imperishable unchanging peace would find pleasure in these earthly delights offered by Yama.

yasminnidam vicikitsanti mṛtyo yat sāmparāye mahati brūhi nas tat ।
yo'yaṁ varo gūḍam anupraviṣṭo nānyaṁ tasmān naciketo vṛṇīte ॥ 29 ॥

mṛtyu - O Death; [stop trying to allure me with ephemeral things and] *brūhi naḥ* = tell us; *tat* = that, which I requested; *yasmin* = about which; [people] *idam vicikitsanti* = entertain doubt; *sāmparāye* = in the context of the great departure; *yat* = which [knowledge]; *mahati* = is calculated to lead to a great result; *ayaṁ varaḥ* = this boon; *yaḥ* = which is; *gūḍam anupraviṣṭaḥ* = has entered into an inaccessible recess [has become extremely inscrutable]; *tasmāt* = apart from that boon; *nānyaṁ* = no other; *naciketā vṛṇīte* = does Naciketas request.

29. Tell us that about which they doubt, O Death, what there is in the great passing-on. No other than this boon which penetrates the mystery, does Naciketas choose.

Commentary

Some commentators say that this (last sentence) is a statement by the Upaniṣad itself (and is not an utterance of Naciketas).

sāmparāya: — passing-on. What is the great beyond? What is there after Liberation! These questions lead naturally to others. What is the nature of eternal reality? What is our relation to it? How can he reach it?

Naciketas has already attained *svarga-loka* and is not raising the question of the post-mortal state. He is asking about the great departure, *mahān sāmparāya*, from which there is no return, which is defined as *nirupādhiśeṣa nirvāṇa* (the state of non-return which is free from all limiting adjuncts of time, space and causation) according to Itivuttaka 44 of the Buddhist Canon.

Knowledge of life after death is regarded as of the utmost importance. See Chandogya Upanishad V:3;1-4 where Svetaketu is told by a prince that he is not well instructed as he does not know about the great departure and where beings go to after death.

> V-3-1: Once Śvetaketu, the grandson of Aruna, came to the assembly of the Panchalas. Pravahana, the son of Jivala, enquired of him, 'My boy, has your father instructed you?' 'He has indeed, revered sir'.
> V-3-2: 'Do you know where created beings go above from here?' No, revered sir'. 'Do you know the place of parting of the two paths – the path of the gods and the path of the fathers?' 'No, revered sir'.
> V-3-3: 'Do you know why the other world is not filled up?' 'No, revered sir'. 'Do you know how, at the fifth oblation, the liquid oblations (or unseen results of action) come to be designated as man?' 'No, indeed, revered sir'.
> V-3-4: 'Then why did you say, "I have been instructed"? For, how can he who does not know these things say, "I have been instructed"?' He was distressed and came to his father's place and said to him, 'Revered Sir, without having instructed me properly you said, "I have instructed you".'



Vaḷḷi 2

THE TWO WAYS

Yama's Teaching

After testing Naciketas and knowing his fitness for receiving Brahma-knowledge, Yama explains the great secret to him.

anyac chreyo 'nyad utaiva preyaste ubhe nānārthe purusaguṁ sinītah |
tayoḥ śreya ādadānasya sādhu bhavati hīyate 'rthād ya u preyo vṛṇīte || 1 ||

śreyaḥ = the preferable, the Moral Good, the supreme goal (freedom from suffering); *anyat eva* (it) is certainly different; *tathā* = similarly; *uta* = too; *preyaḥ* = the more pleasant; *anyat eva* = (is) different indeed; *te ubhe* = both of them; *nānā arthe* = serving divergent purposes; *sinītaḥ* = bind; *puruṣam* = a person: *tayoḥ* = of the two; *ādadānasya* = one who chooses [only]: *śeyaḥ* = the preferable, *sādhu bhavati* = well-being, good comes; *yaḥ u* = the one that; *preyaḥ vṛṇīte* — selects the pleasurable; *hīyate* = gets alienated; *arthāt* = from this objective, from the human goal; [i.e. falls from the eternal supreme purpose].

1. (Yama said): There are two paths; the good and the pleasant. Different indeed are their purposes but both of them bind one. Of these two, it is well for one who takes hold of the good; but one who chooses the pleasant, loses the very object of human life.

Commentary

Every being is motivated by the drive to be free from suffering (*dukha*) and achieve abiding happiness (*sukha*). As humans we do this through the pursuit of one of two paths: the path of pleasure and the fulfillment of desires known the "delectable" — *preyas*; or through the path of *śreyas* or the "electable" which is the pursuit of liberation from Samsāra. One either hankers after prosperity, power and pleasure to avoid the material causes of suffering or craves freedom from the root cause of suffering (ignorance — *avidya*) through emancipation (*mokṣa*). Therefore, everyone is said to be *bound* by these two in that they cling avidly to one or the other. But both of these paths are opposed to each other, inasmuch as the path of Pleasure is based on spiritual ignorance (*avidya*) and perpetuates one's suffering and continued existence in Samsara; and the path of the Good arises from wisdom (*vidya*) and is conducive to one's ultimate liberation from Samsāra. Every one eventually must make the choice to pursue one or the other of these two paths. The question may be asked "If we have free-will in this matter why do most people cling to the pleasurable only"? This will now be answered.

Cp. Samyutta Nikāya I.4.2.6.

tasmā satañ ca asatañ ca nānā hoti ito gati |
asanto nirayam yanti satañ saggaparāyaṇā ||

Therefore do the paths of the good and the evil of this world divide; the evil go to hell but the final destination of the good is heaven.

In Samyutta Nikāya V.4.5.2 instead of *saggaparāyaṇā*, (going to heaven) we read *nibbāna-parāyaṇam* (attaining nirvana)

śreyaś ca preyaś ca manuṣyam etas tau samparītya vivinakti dhīrah |
śreyo hi dhīro'bhipreyaso vṛṇīte preyo mando yoga-kṣemād vṛṇīte || 2 ||

śreyaḥ ca preyaḥ ca = the preferable and the pleasurable; *manuṣyam etaḥ* = approach people; [as though they are a couple. Therefore just as a swan separates milk from water, similarly]; *dhīraḥ* = the intelligent one;

samparītya = having pondered fully, having considered their importance and unimportance; *vivinakti* = separates; *tau* = those two. [And having distinguished]; *abhivṛṇīte* = selects; *śreyaḥ hi* = the electable indeed; *preyasaḥ* = in preference to the delectable; *mandaḥ* = simple-mind; *vṛṇīte* = selects; *yoga-kṣemāt* = material well-being, one adopts a materialist view of life for the sake of nourishing and protecting of the body and procreating.

2. Both the good and the pleasant approach one. The wise one, pondering over them, discriminates. The wise chooses the good in preference to the pleasant. The simple-minded for the sake of material wellbeing, prefers the pleasant.

Commentary

Everyone has the free-will to choose but since most people do not have the ability to discriminate with regard to their means or with regard to their results, therefore they make the wrong choice.

yoga-kṣema — Shankara understands *yoga* (union) to refer to the contemplation of the divine — *jñāna* and *kṣema* (well-being) being the elimination of faults and the acquisition of virtues which are the results of Karma.

Rāmānuja takes *yoga* to mean the development of the body and kṣema is everything that is accumulated and consumed for its protection. (*śarīrasya upacayaḥ yogaḥ, kṣema paripālanam*)

Dr. A Coomaraswamy suggests that the simple-minded (*manda*) refered to in this verse is one who prefers *kṣema* or well-being to *yoga* or contemplation, *yogāc ca kṣemāc ca*, taking his stand on Sutta Nipāta 2.20:

asamā ubho dūra-vihāravuttino, gihī dāraposī, amamā ca subbato.

'Unlike and widely divergent are the habits of the wedded householder and the holy monk without a sense of ego.

He says that this verse means that the fool prefers the ease of the householder to the hard life of the Yogi or mendicant. (See New Indian Antiquary, Vol. i, pp, 85-86).

sa tvam priyān priya rūpāguṁś ca kāmān abhidhyāyan naciketo'tyasrākṣīḥ ।
naitāguṁ sṛṅkāṁ vittamayīm avāpto yasyāṁ majjanti bahavo manuṣyāḥ ॥ 3 ॥

naciketaḥ = O Naciketas; *saḥ tvam* = you, such as you are [though tempted by me again and again]; *abhidhyāyan* = having considered the defects such as impermanence and unsubstantiality of; *kāmān* = desirable things; *ca* = and; *priyān* = dear ones such as spouse, offspring etc; *priya-rūpāṁ* = producers of delight, such as nymphs etc.; *atyasrākṣīḥ* = you have rejected; *na avāptaḥ* = you have not accepted; etāṁ = this; *sṛṅkāṁ* = course; *vittamayīm* = abounding in wealth; *yasyām* = by which; *bahavaḥ* = many; *manuṣyāḥ* = mortals; *majjanti* = sink, come to grief.

3. 'You, O Nachiketas, after pondering all pleasures that are or seem delightful, have rejected them all. You have not gone onto the road that leads to wealth, in which many mortals have perished.

Commentary

If *sṛṅkāṁ* is taken to mean chain rather than road, then *majjanti* should read *sajjanti*. The meaning would then be; 'You have not taken to the chain of wealth in which many mortals are entangled'.

The Buddha also refused the wheel-jewel, *cakka-ratanam*, the recognised symbol of temporal power that was offered to him. Naciketas, by refusing all these temptations, states clearly that his goal is not to have and to become someone of this ephemeral world — he hungers and thirsts for the eternal, in which alone he can find real satisfaction and abiding joy — *ānanda*.

dūram ete viparīte viṣūcī avidyā yā ca vidyeti jñātā |
vidyābhīpsinaṁ naciketasam manye na tvā kāmā bahavo lolupanta || 4 ||

ete = these two; *dūram* = widely, by a great distance; *viparīte* = contradictory, mutually exclusive; *viṣūcī* = have divergent courses; *yā ca* = that which; *jñātā* = is fully ascertained, known by the learned; *avidyā iti* = ignorance (the pleasurable); *yā ca* = and that which is; *vidyā iti* = as knowledge (the preferable). *manye* = I consider; you had; *naciketasam* = Naciketas; *vidyābhīpsinaṁ* = as desirous of knowing; *bahavaḥ* = many; *kāmā* = enjoyable things, *na lolupantaḥ* = did not tempt; *tvā* = you;

4. Wide apart and leading to divergent ends are these; ignorance (*avidya*) and what is known as wisdom (*vidya*). I know you O Naciketas, to be eager for wisdom for (even) many desirable pleasures did not distract you.

Commentary

Śaṅkara suggests that avidyā or ignorance is concerned with the pleasant and *vidyā* or wisdom with the good.

Rāmānuja interprets *avidyā* to be concerned with desire and the fulfillment of desires whereas *vidyā* is associated with dispassion (*vairāgya*) and with the knowledge of the true essence of all things (*tattva-jñāna-mayī*).

In the Īśa Upaṇiṣad the term *avidya* is used in the sense of rituals (*Karma-khāṇḍa*) which are performed for the sake of gaining material objects and accomplishments and *Vidya* denotes the way of knowledge (*Jñāna khāṇḍa*).

avidyāyām antare vartamānāḥ svayaṁ dhīrāḥ paṇḍitaṁ manyamānāḥ |
dandramyamāṇāḥ pariyanti mūḍhāḥ andhenaiva nīyamānā yathā'ndhāḥ || 5 ||

vartamānāḥ = living; *avidyāyām antare* = in the midst of ignorance - being entangled in hundreds of fetters, forged by craving for sons, cattle, etc.; *manyamānāḥ* = considering; *svayam* = we ourselves are; *dhīrāḥ* = intelligent; *paṇḍitam* = versed in the Scriptures; those; *mūḍhāḥ* = senseless, non-discriminating people; *pariyanti* = go round and round; *dandramyamāṇāḥ* = wise in their own esteem or by following closely the various crooked courses, being afflicted by old age, death, disease, etc.; just as many; *andhāḥ* = blind people; *nīyamānāḥ* = being led; *andhena eva* = by the blind indeed, on an uneven road, come to great calamity.

5. Abiding in the midst of ignorance, wise in their own esteem, thinking themselves to be learned, fools wander painfully about like blind led by the blind.

Commentary

Rāmānuja says that their ignorance is serenely ignorant of itself and so assumes the appearance of wisdom. And they wander around in the mire of aquisition and consumption with endless episodes of alternating suffering and happiness and become further entrenched in Samsāra.

na sāṁparāyaḥ pratibhāti bālaṁ pramādyantaṁ vitta-mohena mūḍham |
ayaṁ loko nāsti para iti mānī punaḥ punarvaśam ādyate me || 6 ||

sāmparāyaḥ = is the other world, and also any particular scriptural means leading to the attainment of that other world. And this (means) *na pratibhāti* = does not become revealed to, ie. does not become serviceable to; *bālam* = a boy, a non-discriminating one; (who is) *pramādyantaṁ* = blundering; *mūḍham* = confounded, being totally immersed in ignorance: *vitta-mohena* = because of the delusion

caused by wealth. *ayaṁ lokaḥ* = there is only this world that which is visible and abounds with sex, food, drink, etc.; *na para asti* = there is no other world; *iti mānī* = constantly thinking thus; (he) being born, *punaḥ punaḥ* = again and again; *ādyate* = becomes subject to; *vaśam me* = my control; that is, one remains involved in a succession of suffering in the form of birth, death, etc.

6. What lies beyond [death] is not apparent to the blundering simple-minded being deluded by the glamour of wealth. Thinking this world alone exists, there being no other, he falls again and again under my sway.

Commentary

One who is obsessed by self-referent desires and attracted by worldly status and possessions performs acts to achieve those goals and thus becomes subject to the law of Karma. Accumulation of Karma leads to repeated rebirth, and so one is said to come repeatedly under the control of Yama.

śravaṇāyāpi bahubhir yo na labhyaḥ śṛṇvanto'pi bahavo yaṁ na vidyuḥ |
āścaryo vaktā kuśalo'sya labdhā āścaryo jñātā kuśalānu-śiṣṭaḥ || 7 ||

yaḥ = that which [the Self that]; *na labhyaḥ* = is not attainable; *bahubhiḥ* = by many; *śravaṇāya api* = even by hearing; *yaṁ* = which [the Self]; *bahavaḥ* = many (others); *śṛṇvantaḥ api* = even while hearing; *na vidyuḥ* = do not know; *asya vaktā* = Its expounder; (is) *āścaryaḥ* = wonderful, a rare one; [even after hearing of the Self]; *kuśalaḥ* = one who is proficient, skilful; [becomes the] *labdhā* = attainer. For *āścaryaḥ* = a wonder is the, *jñātā* = knower; *kuśalānu-śiṣṭaḥ* = being instructed by a skilful teacher.

7. That (*paramātman*) which cannot even be heard of by many, whom many, upon even hearing do not comprehend, very rare is one who can teach and skilful is one who understands (It) and rare is he who knows Him, when instructed by the skilful.

Commentary

Naciketas is being complimented by Yama because a sincere seeker of true spiritual knowledge is very rare indeed. The spiritual path is extremely difficult because the nature of the Self is so subtle. The hidden depths of our own personal being are a great mystery. Not many have the earnest determination to begin the quest and fewer still the staying power to persevere in the practice. And of those that are sincere and determined, not many are able to find a proper skilful teacher.

āścaryavat paśyati kaścid enam āścaryavad vadati tathaiva cānyaḥ |
āścaryavac cainam anyaḥ śṛṇoti śātvāpy-enaṁ veda na caiva kaścit ||

One regards this Self as a wonder, likewise another speaks of it as a wonder; still another hears of it as a wonder; and even after hearing of it, one knows it not. (Bhagavad Gita 2:29)

manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu kaścid yatati siddhaye |
yatatām-api siddhānāṁ kaścin māṁ vetti tattvataḥ ||

Among thousands of men, perhaps one strives for perfection; even among those who strive for perfection, one only may know Me; and among those who know Me, one alone perhaps, knows Me in reality. (Bhagavad Gita 7:3)

In Vivekacuḍāmaṇi Śaṅkara says:—

3. These are three things which are rare indeed and are due to the grace of God – namely, a human birth, the longing for Liberation, and the protecting care of a perfected sage.

na nareṇāvarena prokta eṣa suvijñeyo bahudhā cintyamānaḥ |
ananya-prokte gatir atra nāsty aṇīyān hy atarkyam aṇupramāṇāt || 8 ||

eṣaḥ = the Self; [when] *proktaḥ* = spoken of; *avarena nareṇa* = by an inferior man, ie. by a person of worldly understanding; *na hi suvjñeyaḥ* = is not certainly liable to be adequately understood [for It is]; *bahudhā*, variously - such as "It exists", it does not exist", "It is the doer", It is not the doer"; *cintyamānaḥ* = deliberated on - by the disputants. [The Self] *ananya-prokte* = when taught by a teacher who sees clearly, who is Self-realised: *atra* = here, with regard to the Self; *na asti* = there does not remain; *gatiḥ* = cogitation [upon it for it is]; *atarkyam* = not subject to being argued about; [because it is]; *aṇīyān* = more subtle, *aṇu-pramāṇāt* = than an atom.

8. That [Atman] cannot be truly understood when taught by an inferior person, as It is conceived of in many ways. When taught by one who is fully Self-realised, there is no further disputation with regard to it. For it cannot be known by argument, being subtler than an atom.

Commentary

bahudhā cintyamānaḥ: — thought of in many ways, or it may mean 'much meditated upon' or 'conceived of as a plurality' while the ātman is an absolute unity.

gatir atra nāsti — '"There is no going thither" — may mean either there is nothing beyond the knowledge of Paramātman or there is no way back to Samsāra or worldly becoming; there is no more disputation about it; or it could mean there is no way to know about or realise the Self without access to a teacher.

atarkyam: — inconceivable, unprovable by argument. The Supreme Self is unknowable by argument, as It is subtle, beyond the reach of the senses and the understanding based on sense data. It can only be immediately apprehended by intuition.

ananya-prokte — a teacher who is non-different i.e. has realised his essential identity with Paramātman, having personal and immediate experience, he is lifted above sectarian disputes.

There are several different readings for this rather abstruse verse:

It may also simply mean;— "taught by some one other than the inferior mentioned earlier,'i.e. a superior person who knows the truth. Or taught by another — someone other than oneself," i.e. By some skilful teacher.

Some other rendering by Non-dual (Advaita) scholars;

(a) "When the (supreme) Self, that is non-different from, and is, one's very Self is properly taught; there is nothing else to be known. For the realisation of the unity of the Self is the culmination of all knowledge. Therefore, as there is no knowable, there remains nothing to be known here".

(b) "When the theory of the non-dual Self is taught followed by realisation, there remains no further transmigration; for liberation which is the result of that realisation, follows, immediately".

(c) "When the Self is taught by a teacher who has become identified with the Brahman that he teaches, there is no "non-realisation". To the student, the realisation, "I am that (Self)", dawns, just as it did in the case of the teacher."

The Qualified Non-dual (Visiṣṭadvaita) interpretation is:

Thus, the Self is well understood when It is taught to be non-different (ie. The essence of the taught) by a teacher who, is well versed in the Scriptures. Otherwise the Self becomes more subtle; even than an atomic particle. For It cannot be argued out - cannot be known through mere reasoning based upon one's own independent intellect. If the Self

is regarded as an object of argumentation and postulated to be atomic, someone else may hold It to be subtler than that — like a neutron, while still another may hold It to be even more subtle — thus there is no end to sophistry.

For Ramanuja, the understanding, which a person gets about the Self when taught by one who has realised Brahman is impossible to get when taught by a person of inferior capacity who has not realised Brahman. But the realisation spoken of cannot be "identity with Brahman" as Shankara thinks, because if there is only One ātman and One Brahman which are both identical then realisation would mean the total and exclusive non-perception of difference. Therefore, who would teach and who would be the taught? It would in fact be like one teaching one's self while looking in the mirror!

naiṣā tarkeṇa matir āpaneyā proktā'nyenaiva sujñānāya preṣṭha |
yāṁ tvam āpas satyadhritir batāsi tvādṛṅ no bhūyān naciketaḥ praṣṭā || 9 ||

Therefore *eṣā* = this [teaching about the Self]; *na āpaneyā* = can not to be attained[1]; *tarkeṇa* = through reasoned argumentation. [For, a logician who is not versed in the Vedas, can argue for and against any and every thesis. Therefore]; *preṣṭha* = O dearest one; *sujñānāya bhavati* = leads to sound knowledge; [when] *prokte* = imparted; *anyena eva* = by a different person indeed — by a teacher who is versed in the Vedas [unlike the logician]. *yāṁ* = that (teaching) which; *tvam āpaḥ* = you have attained; [by my grace]; *asi* = you are; *naciketaḥ* = O Naciketas; *satya-dhritiḥ* = of true resolution. Yama utters the word *bata* (a particle expressing compassion) out of profound affection for Naciketas, thereby eulogising the knowledge, that is going to be imparted. [May all other other] *praṣṭā* = enquirers; *naḥ* = from us; *bhūyān* = be; *tvādṛk* = like you.

9. Not by reasoning is this knowledge attainable, dearest, but taught by another, it is well understood. You have obtained it, holding fast to truth. May we find, Naciketas, other inquirers like you.

Commentary

In this verse Yama expresses his great affection for Naciketas as the paragon of a perfect disciple; serious, inquisitive, steadfast, and determined to know. It is not only the student who is in search of the perfect preceptor, but the teacher is also in search of an ardent and sincere student. Furthermore Yama declares that this knowledge cannot be attained by mere reason and unassisted by a firm faith cannot lead to enlightenment.

Pillai Lokacharya describes the characteristics of a sincere and worthy disciple are as follows;—

Desists from all aims other than spiritual practice and devotional service.
Is eager to adopt spiritual practice and discipline.
Feels oppressed by Samsara and is eager to be liberated from it.
Is humble and respectful.
Is free from envy. (Srivachana Bhushana 321)

The path of knowledge requires an proactive quest on the part of the aspirant.

tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā |
upadekṣayanti te jñānaṁ jñāninas-tattva-darśinaḥ ||

Know that by full prostration, by extensive questioning and by service, the wise, who have realised the truth, will instruct you in [that] teaching. (Bhagavad Gītā 4:34)

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[1] *na āpaneyā* if read as *na apaneyā* it would mean - cannot be destroyed or erradicated.

THE SUPERIORITY OF WISOM TO WEALTH, EARTHLY AS WELL AS HEAVENLY

jānāmy aham śevadhir ity anityam na hy adhruvaiḥ prāpyate hi dhruvaṁ tat |
tato mayā nāciketaś cito'gnir anityair dravyaiḥ prāptavān asmi nityam || 10 ||

aham jānāmi = I know; *iti* = (this fact) that; *śevadhiḥ* = the treasure [comprising the fruits of action, which are ardently pursued]; *anityam* = are impermanent; *hi* = for indeed; *tat* = that; *dhruvaṁ* = permanent reality, *na hi* = cannot be; *prāpyate* = attained; *adhruvaiḥ* = through that which is impermanent; *tataḥ* = therefore; *mayā* = by me; *nāciketaḥ cito'gniḥ* = the fire called Naciketa (productive of heavenly bliss) was accomplished; *anityaiḥ dravyaiḥ* = with impermanent things. [Having acquired the requisite merit thereby], *prāptavān asmi* = I have achieved; *nityam* = the everlasting [the relatively everlasting abode of Yama which is called heaven].

10. I know that wealth is impermanent. The Eternal is not attained through non-eternal things; yet by performing the Naciketa Sacrifice, I have, by sacrificing impermanent things reached the imperishable goal.

Commentary

Some translators (e.g. Max Muller and Hume) attribute this verse to Naciketas. But surely Naciketas has not yet performed the sacrifice called by his name as he is still in conference with Yama.

Shankara attributes these words to Yama, who makes out that through the sacrificial fire meditation that he taught earlier, he has obtained the enduring sovereignty of heaven. But this sovereignty is only relatively permanent. Through the transitory means of Karma (action) including sacrifices, nothing truly permanent can be achieved. The performer of the Naciketa fire-sacrifice will endure as long as the cosmos lasts but such endurance is not eternity, since the cosmos with all that it contains will be absorbed (*pralaya*) into the eternal at the end of the cosmic day.

Rāmānuja says that this verse means that by burning in sacrifice all transient things the eternal is attained — in other words we must perforce use the finite tools available to us to obtain that which is infinite. The trans-empirical is obtained through the empirical.

Another commentator Gopala Yatindra has stated that through sacrifice Yama obtained his status as Overseer of Dharma and the controller of all beings.

kāmasyā'ptiṁ jagataḥ pratiṣṭhāṁ kratoṛ ānantyaṁ abhayasya pāram |
stoma-mahad urugāyam pratiṣṭhāṁ dṛṣṭvā dhṛtyā dhīro naciketo'tyasrākṣīḥ || 11 ||

But you, *dṛṣṭvā* = having seen, examined; *kāmasya-āptiṁ* = the goal of desire - [all desires reach their fulfillment in the state of enlightenment and freedom from suffering]; having realised; *jagataḥ pratiṣṭhāṁ* = the support of the universe, the substratum; *ānantyaṁ* = infinitude or final end of; *kratuḥ* = meditation or sacrifices. (having seen) *pāram* = the other shore, the utmost limit; *abhayasya* = of fearlessness;) *urugāyam* = the expanse; which is *stoma* = praiseworthy, and *mahat* = great (and having seen) *pratiṣṭhāṁ* = existence, foundation of existence [your own state]; *naciketaḥ* = O Naciketas; with *dhṛtyā* = patience; and *dhīraḥ* = Intelligent, enlightened; [you have] *atyasrākṣīḥ* = renounced [all those material enjoyments I offered to you.]

11. Having examined patiently the consummate fulfillment of desire, the support of the universe, the final end of meditation, the other shore where there is no fear, the great expanse that is praiseworthy, the far-stretching, the foundation of life, O wise Naciketas, you have steadfastly renounced.

Commentary

According to Shankara, Naciketas had spread before him, all the allurements of the material world, including the position of Brahma the highest state in the phenomenal world, obtained by those who worship the Supreme Being through sacrifice and meditation, and he has rejected them all.

Here perhaps is suggested the contrast between the Vedic ideal of heaven and the Upanishad ideal of liberation.

The fulfilment of all desire can refer to all the heavenly realms which are reachable by Karma and it can also apply to the immortal Brahman. It is the support of the world, the Ultimate Reality. M.U. 3:2:1. If we take these words in this is the way, then the reference cannot be to the Vedic heaven but to final liberation or moksha.

the great expanse that is praiseworthy — Rāmānuja takes this to mean qualities like indestructability (*avināśitva*) absolute fearlessness (*atyanta-nirbhayatva*) freedom from all sinful inclination (*apahatva-pāpmatva*), having the ability to actualise concepts (*satya-saṅkalpatva*) and many others — all these relate to the state of Mokṣa.

Renunciation refers to the rejection of the objects offered by Yama but it can aslo mean a rejection of false views concerning the topics raised in this verse itself.

APPREHENSION OF THE SUPREME THROUGH ADHYATMA-YOGA

taṁ durdarśaṁ gūḍham anupraviṣṭaṁ guhāhitaṁ gahvareṣṭham purāṇam |
adhyātma-yogādhigamena devam matvā dhīro harṣa-śokau jahāti || 12 ||

matvā = meditating on; *taṁ* = Him; that *purāṇam* = ancient, everlasting; *devam* = Deity/Self; *durdarśaṁ* = hard to perceive; *gūḍham anupraviṣṭaṁ* = deeply hidden; *guhāhitaṁ* = situated in the depth of the mind; *gahvareṣṭham* = existing in the midst of misery [in the body/mind complex which is the source of all suffering]; *adhyātma-yogādhigamena* = focussing of the mind upon the Ātman; *dhīraḥ* = the Intelligent person; *jahāti* = is freed from, abandons; *harṣa-śokau* = happiness and sorrow.

12. Realising through self-contemplation that Paramātman, difficult to be seen, deeply hidden, situated in the cave (of the heart/intellect), dwelling in the depth, the wise-one leaves behind both joy and sorrow.

Commentary

Yama tells Naciketas about the mysterious Divine Being hidden in the depths of one's own being, which is difficult of access by ordinary means such as perception (*pratyakṣaṁ*) and reason (*anumāna*) and yet is accessible by meditation. Yama, in different ways and phrases, brings out the impenetrable mystery of the inmost reality which is the goal of the spiritual journey. If the Brahma world is the fulfilment of all desires, this eternal bliss is obtained by the renunciation of all desires; while Brahma-loka is the highest place of the manifested cosmos, its farthest limit, there is the eternal which is far beyond it.

gūḍham — deeply hidden. It is hidden because we have to get behind the senses, mind and understanding. It is the very ground of the Self. The Buddhists look upon every creature as an embryo of the *tathāgata, tathāgata-garbha*. Every creature has the possibility of becoming a Buddha. When we reach the sub-conscious mind, we are in immediate relationship with the Eternal. This basic principle which we recognise by direct experience or continued contemplation is the basis of human freedom. It is the principle of indeterminacy, the possibilities of determinations which are not yet. If we identify ourselves with what is determinate, we are subject to the law of determinism.

It is deeply hidden because it is obscured by *avidya* in the form of Karma. — Rāmānuja.

adhyātma-yoga — self-contemplation. *adhyātma* means pertaining to the Self as distinct from *adhibhūta*, pertaining to the material elements and *adhidaiva*, pertaining to the deities. Adhyātma yoga is connecting with one's essential self. It is the practice of meditation, a quiet, solitary sustained effort to apprehend truth which is different from the ordinary process of cerebration. The insight into the nature of the jīvātman is the cause of the knowledge of the Paramātman.

See ŚU. 1.3; Maitrī VI.23.

23. And thus it has been said elsewhere: The syllable Om is what is called the word. And its end is the silent, the soundless, fearless, sorrowless, joyful, satisfied, firm, unwavering, immortal, immovable, certain (Brahman), called Vish*n*u. Let him worship these two, that he may obtain what is higher than everything (final deliverance). For thus it is said:

'He who is the high and the highest god, by name Om-kāra, he is soundless and free from all distinctions: therefore let a man contemplate on him in the crown of his head.'

etac chrutvā samparigṛhya martyaḥ pravṛhya dharmyam aṇum etam āpya ǀ
sa modate modanīyaguṁ hi labdhvā vivṛtaguṁ sadma naciketasam manye ǁ 13 ǁ

śrutvā = after hearing the teaching on; *etat* = that reality of the Self that I shall speak of; *samparigṛhya* = after intellectually grasping, comprehending (It) fully; *pravṛhya* = after separating; *dharmyam* = the essence, the true nature of it; *āpya* = after attaining, realising; *aṇum etam* = this subtle thing - the Self; *saḥ martyaḥ* = that [enlightened] mortal; *modate* = rejoices; *labdhvā* = having obtained, reached; *modanīyatṁ* = that which causes great delight; *manye* = I consider; [that the] *sadma* = mansion - the experience of Brahman; *vivṛtaṁ* = is wide open; *naciketasam* = [to you] O Naciketas.

13. Hearing this and comprehending (it), separating the essence and realising the subtle, one rejoices, having attained the source of supernal bliss. I know that such an experience is wide open unto you O Naciketas.

Commentary

pravṛhya dharmyam — separating the essence. We must extract its essential nature, discern its real character and separate the real from the unreal, the permanent from the impermanent, wisdom from delusion.

Rāmānuja takes this to mean separation from the adjunct of the body and mind. Or it can also mean that the "mansion" of the body/mind complex is wide open and no longer confining as in the words of the Buddha upon enlightenment:

'Never again shalt thou, O builder of houses, make a house for me;
broken are all thy beams, thy ridgepole shattered.'

modanīyam: — the source of great joy. In the deepest space of our being is the highest beatitude. To attain That which is the Ultimate Reality is to gain supernal, abiding bliss. It is not the merging in a negative, characterless Absolute, where all experience is extinguished.

vivṛtaṁ sadma: — the abode or true space of Being referred to as Brahman (the Immensity); it means our ultimate and true resting place or ontological experience is wide open to being personally realised by each and every one of us. The stress is placed upon our personal experience of the Ultimate Truth.

In this verse Yama mentions the three classical steps on the path of discipleship:

> **śravana** (*śrutva*) — listening attentively to the teaching
> **manana** (*samparigṛhya*) — reflecting rationally and developing discrimination
> and **nididhyāsana** (*pravṛhya*) — putting the teaching into practice and realising personally the truth of the teaching.

anyatra dharmād anyatrādharmād anyatrāsmāt kṛtākṛtāt ǀ
anyatra bhūtāc ca bhavyāc ca yat tat paśyasi tad vada ǁ 14 ǁ

anyatra = different; *dharmāt* = from right action - i.e. from the performance of scripturally enjoined duties, their results, and their accessories; *adharmāt* = different from wrong action; *asmāt kṛtākṛtāt* =

different from the effect, and the cause; *bhūtāt* = from what was, *bhavyāt* = or will be; *yat tat paśyasi* = whatever it is that you see, you know with surety; *tat* = that; *vada* = tell me.

14. (Naciketas said:) Tell me about that which you see beyond Dharma and Adharma, beyond cause and effect, beyond past and future.

Commentary

anyatra dharmāt adharmāt (beyond Dharma and Adharma) — Dharma here refers to all those actions prescribed by the Shastras, their auxiliaries and their result which is heaven. *Adharma* refers to all those actions which are proscribed by the Shastras and which lead to hell.

Vedic religion prescribes many methods for achieving enjoyment in *svarga* (heaven) and avoiding *naraka* (hell) but this is still a continuation of the earthly material struggle of all beings which is a perpetual search for happiness and avoidance of suffering. Vedic religion as such constitutes spiritual materialism. This is opposed to the Upanishadic quest for enlightenment and Liberation from all conditioned states of happiness and suffering be they material or spiritual.

Rāmānuja says that Naciketas is asking about (1) the nature goal (*prāpya svarūpam*), (2) the nature of the means of attainment (*upāya-svarūpaṁ*) and the nature of the attainer (*prāptu-svarūpam*). Dharma means *upāya* or method different and distinct from the well-known means to attain *svarga*. Adharma is the goal and the aspirant is refered to by the term "*asmāt kṛtākṛtāt (what is done or not done): —* According to Shankara this is construed as "effect and cause", being our Karma. (*krtam kāryam, akṛtaṁ kāraṇam*).

If we take Dharma and Adharma to refer to the paths of right and wrong action and then *"what is done and what is not done"* will refer to actions which are prescribed and prohibited.

bhūtāt ca bhavyāt ca (*beyond Past and future): —* the eternal is a 'now' without duration. Naciketas is asking about the nature of Reality which is beyond the reach of all empirical experience, and is not limited by the three times (past, present, and future);

Naciketas asks for an account of that deepest ontological reality free from all extraneous externalities of religiosity, freed from the constraining bonds of dogma; free from our conditioned experience of actions and their results; the real which is deeper than all the chimera of time and space.

THE MYSTIC WORD AUM

sarve vedā yat padam āmananti tapāguṁsi sarvāṇi ca yad vadanti |
yad icchanto brahmacaryaṁ caranti tatte padaguṁ saṅgraheṇa bravīmyom ityetat ||

yat padam = the goal which; *sarve vedā* = all the Vedas; *āmananti* = propound; *ca* = and; *yat* = that which; *sarvāṇi tapāṁsi* = all the austerities; *vadanti* = speak of [are meant for the attainment of]; *yat icchantaḥ* = desiring which; *caranti* = (they) practise; *brahmacaryam* = the religious life [which that consists either in residence (for study) in the house of the teacher or some other kind of observance meant for the attainment of Brahman]; *bravīmi* = I tell; *te* = you; *saṅgraheṇa* = in brief; *tat* = that goal; *om iti etat* = OM it is.

15. (Yama said) That goal which all the Vedas declare, which all the disciplines proclaim, desiring which (people) live the religious life, I shall describe it by a single word — AUM.

Commentary

yad-akṣaraṁ deva-vido vadanti viśanti yad-yatayo vītarāgāḥ |
yad-icchanto brahmacaryaṁ caranti tat-te padaṁ saṅgraheṇa pravakṣye ||

I shall declare to you briefly that goal, which the knowers of the Veda call the Imperishable, which ascetics, free from desire enter, and for attaining which, they practise the vow of Brahmacarya. (Gita 8:11)

om-ity-ekākṣaraṁ brahma vyāharan mām-anusmaran |
yaḥ prayāti tyajan-dehaṁ sa yāti paramāṁ gatim ||

Uttering the sacred syllable 'Om' which denotes the Absolute (Brahman), thinking of Me constantly — one who abandons the body and departs thus, reaches the supreme goal. (Gita 8:13)

Pada: — word or goal, the Supreme state of Beatitude. The Supreme Being is the goal of all revelation, of all religious practices and austerities.

Brahmacārya — "moving in the Divine" — the life of a religious student. It is referred to in R.V. X.109 and described in Atharva Veda XI. 5. It lasts for twelve years but may be longer. Svetaketu was a brahmacarin from 12 to 24. The student is expected to live in the house of his teacher, wait on him, tend his home and cattle, beg for his own and his master's food, look after the sacrificial fires and study the Veda. Detailed rules for brahmacarya are given in the Grhya Sutra.

The legislator Aśvalāyana says that a brahmacarin is required to be chaste, obedient, to drink only water and not sleep in the daytime. Brahmacarya has come to mean continence and self-restraint.

AUM is called the pranava, which, by the time of the Upanisads, is charged with the significance of the entire universe. The Hindu concept of the universe is threefold. The three sounds representing all the "trifactors" —

The 3 attributes of Brahman = *sat* - existence, *cit* - consciousness and *ānanda* - bliss

the trinity = Brahma, Vishnu, Siva
space = outer, inner (mental), transcendental
Time = past, present future
Gunas = sattva, rajas tamas
Consciousness waking, dream, unconsciousness

etadd hy evākṣaram brahma etadd hy evakṣaram param |
etadd hy evākṣaram jñātvā yo yad icchati tasya tat || 16 ||

etat hi eva akṣaram brahma = this syllable AUM indeed is Brahma (the individual Self); *etat hi eva akṣaram param* = this syllable indeed is the Supreme Self; *etat hi eva akṣaram jñātvā* = one who knows this syllable; *yaḥ* = who, anybody, *yat* = whatever; *icchati* = he desires; *tasya* = to him; *tat* = that.

16. This syllable is, verily, the individual Self. This syllable, indeed, is the highest Self; knowing this very syllable, whatever anyone desires will, indeed, be his.

Commentary

Wherever one wishes to go whether it be to the realisation of the individual Self (jiva atman) or the Supreme Self (param atman), meditation on the syllable OM will lead one there.

Śaṅkara makes out that Brahmā is the lower Brahman and *param*, the higher. Whatever one may desire, the lower or the higher Brahman, his desire will be fulfilled.

etad ālambanaṁ śreṣṭham etad ālambanam param |
etad alambanaṁ jñātvā brahma-loke mahīyate || 17 ||

etat = this is; *śreṣṭham* = the best of; *ālambanaṁ* = means or support; *param* = the supreme; *etat ālambanaṁ jñātvā* = knowing this means; *brahma-loke mahīyate* = revels in the world of Brahma.

17. This means is the best (of all). This means is the highest; knowing this means, one revels in the blissful realm of the Supreme.

Commentary

Contemplating on Om is the unpassed means or support for taking one from the realisation of the individual Self to the realisation of the cosmic Self. In that state of cosmic awareness there is nothing but Supreme beatitude.

THE ETERNAL SELF

na jāyate mriyate vā vipaścin nāyaṁ kutaścin na babhūva kaścit |
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yam purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre || 18 ||

vipaścin = the cognising one; *na jāyate* = is not born, is not produced; *mriyate vā* = nor does it die; *ayaṁ* = this one; *na kutaścit* = did not orginate from anything, did not arise from any other cause; *na kaścit babhūva* = and does not originate anything else, does not cause new staes of being; *ajaḥ* = unborn; *nityaḥ* = eternal; *śaśvataḥ* = not subject to decay; *ayam* = this is; *purāṇaḥ* = ancient, always new; *na hanyate* = it is not killed or injured; *hanyamāne śarīre* = when the body is killed.

purāṇah: primeval, new even in old times, *purā api navaḥ*, or devoid of growth, *vrddhi-vivarjitaḥ.*

18. The cognising self is never born; nor does it die at any time. It did not originate from anything and nothing originates from it. It is unborn, eternal, abiding and primeval. It is not slain when the body is slain.

Commentary

na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ |
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṁ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre || Gita 2:20

The jiva is never born; it never dies; having been existent in the past, it will never cease to be [in the future]. Unborn, eternal, abiding and primeval, it is not slain when the body is slain.

The Self constitutes the inner essence of each individual. It is without a cause and is changeless. When it knows itself as the existent (*sat*), conscious (*cit*) and blissful (*ānanda*) and ceases to identify itself as mind/body complex confined and limited by name and form (*nāma-rūpa*) it attains Self-realisation and liberation.

hantā cen manyate hantuṁ hataś cen manyate hatam |
ubhau tau na vijñānīto nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate || 19 ||

cet = if; *manyate* = one thinks: *hantuṁ* = for the sake of killing; *hantā* = that he slays; *cet* = and if; *manyate* = one thinks; *hataḥ* = it is killed; *ubhau tau* = both of them; *na vijñānītaḥ* = do not comprehend their own Self; *ayaṁ* = this one [Self] *na hanti* = does not kill; *na hanyate* = and is not killed.

19. If the slayer thinks that he slays or if the slain think that he is slain, both of them do not understand the Self — It neither slays nor is it slain.

Commentary

ya enaṁ vetti hantāraṁ yaścainaṁ manyate hatam |
ubhau tau na vijānīto nāyaṁ hanti na hanyate || Gita 2:19 ||

One who deems the Self a slayer, and one who thinks of it as slain — both are ignorant; for the Self neither slays nor is slain.

Ramanuja comments on this verse:—

Though the root *'han'* (to slay) is directed at the Self [in the context], it signifies causing the separation of the jīva from the body and not the destruction of the jīva. Scriptural injunctions like *'You shall not cause injury to beings'* (?) and *'A Brahmin shall not be killed'* (?) indicate acts which are forbidden because they cause the separation of the jīva from the body.

Here is the answer to the question of Naciketas about the mystery of death. The self is uborn (*aja*) eternal (*nitya*) and death does not refer to it.

aṇor aṇīyān mahato mahīyān ātmāsya jantor nihito guhāyām |
tam akratuḥ paśyati vīta-śoko dhātuḥ-prasādān mahimānam ātmanaḥ || 20 ||

aṇīyān = subtler; *aṇoḥ* = than an atom; *mahīyān* = greater; *mahataḥ* = than the greatest; *ātmā* = the Self; *nihitaḥ* = is lodged; *guhāyām* = in the cave of the heart; *asya jantoḥ* = of this creature; *tam* = That; *akratuḥ* = a desireless person; *dhātuḥ-prasādāt* = through the serenity of the organs; *paśyati* = sees, realises; *mahimānam* = the greatness; *ātmanaḥ* = of the Self; *vīta-śokaḥ* = [becomes] freed from suffering.

20. Smaller than the small, greater than the great, the Self is lodged in the heart of every creature. The unstriving one beholds It, freed from sorrow. Through the Grace of the Supreme Being, (one realises) the greatness of the Self.

Commentary

aṇor aṇīyān — "smaller than the small, smaller than the minute atom". When the Self is thought of as a psychic principle, its smallness is emphasised. When it is thought of as cosmic, its vastness is emphasised. Whatever there is in this vast universe which is great or small it is so because of the presence of the Self.

Smallness or Rarity is attributed to God's nature because He is outside all solidity and distance and penetrates all things without let or hindrance. This smallness is without quantity or quality, it is irrepressible, infinite, unlimited, and while comprehending all things, is itself incomprehensible.' Quoted by Ananda Coomaraswamy in New Indian Antiquary, Vol. I, P- 97

a-kratuḥ — "unstriving person". One who is free from desire for rewards for one's actions, and hankering after material objects of gratification, earthly or heavenly, which distract the Self and distorts its vision of itself. One will, however, have the desire for liberation, (*mumukṣutva*) and will be striving for this goal alone.

dhātu-prasādāt — (1) "through the tranquillity of the mind and the senses". Shankara interprets the term "*dhātu*" to refer to the organs which are comprised of seven *dhātus* (substances) according to Ayurveda. The Upaniṣad would thus suggest that achieving an absence of mental anxiety and physical struggle are prerequisites to the vision of the Self.

dhātuḥ prasādāt — (2) "through the grace of the Creator". According to Rāmānuja's reading, the vision is obtained only by the Grace (*prasāda*) or self-revelation of the Personal God (*dhātuḥ* or *dhātṛ*). If this reading is adopted it would be a clear statement of the doctrine of surrender and Divine Grace (*prapatti* or *śaraṇāgati*), which was developed in the SU.3.20.

"Subtler than the subtle, greater than the great is the Self; situated in the heart of all beings. One beholds It as being actionless and becomes freed from suffering, when through the Grace of the Creator, one sees the Lord and His majesty" (Svetasvarata Upanishad 3:20)

See also Mahā-nārāyaṇa U. VIII.3.

THE CONTRADICTORY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SELF

āsīno dūraṁ vrajati śayāno yāti sarvataḥ |

kastam madāmadaṁ devam mad-anyo jñātum arhati || 21 ||

āsīnaḥ = while seated; *vrajati* = it goes; *dūraṁ* = afar; *śayānaḥ* = while sleeping/lying; *yāti* = it goes; *sarvataḥ* = everywhere; *kaḥ* = who; *mad-anyaḥ* = apart from me; *arhati* = is worthy, able; *jñātum* = to known; *tam* = that; *mada-amadaṁ* = that joyful and joyless; *devam* = divinity;

21. Sitting, He moves far; lying He goes everywhere. Who, save myself, is fit to know that Deva who rejoices and rejoices not?

Commentary

By these contradictory predicates, the impossibility of conceiving Paramātma through empirical determinations is brought out.

When applied to the jīva one sees that the jīva is conditioned by so many factors and appears with many contradictory characteristics all of which pertain to the physical embodiment alone. Sleep is the cessation of all activites and all false identification with the mind body ceases. Yet the consciousness assuming a generalised character seems to obtain new identities and creates new experiences in a space which is unlimited and a time which seems to be endless. It is only oneself that can know the true essence of the Self by the self.

Shankara comments that the Ultimate Reality has both peaceful stability and active energising. In the former aspect It is known as *Brahman* (the Absolute); in the latter as *Īśvara* (Personal God). According to Shankara the Personal God is an active manifestation of the Absolute Brahman, and not an illusory one as some later Advaita Vedantins suggest.

Rāmānuja rejects this proposition of Shankara and interprets this verse to refer to the Over-Self. The Jīvātma is pervaded by the Paramātman — Nārāyaṇa is the Self of the Self - while the jīvātma can be said to be acting the Paramātman watches on and is not affected thereby.

See īśa 4 and 5.

aśarīragum śarīreṣvanavastheṣu avasthitam |
mahāntaṁ vibhum ātmānaṁ matvā dhīro na śocati || 22 ||

matvā = having meditated [upon]; *mahāntaṁ* = the great; *vibhum* = all pervading; *ātmānam* = Self; *aśarīraṁ* = bodiless; *śarīreṣu* = among bodies; *avasthitam* = unchanging, stable, permanent; *anavastheṣu* = in the impermanent, transient; *dhīraḥ* = the wise one; *na śocati* = does not grieve, experience suffering.

22. Meditating upon the Supreme Self, the all-pervading which is bodiless among bodies, the stable among the transient, the wise one does not experience suffering.

Commentary

The wise one who knows that the individual-Self, though now embodied due to Karma and subject to apparent change, is in fact non-different from the all-pervading Supreme-Self and in truth is not affected by physical states and temporal transformations and therefore has no cause for grief. He goes beyond all fear and sorrow and attains abiding joy (*paramānanda*). This state beyong sorrow is achieved through regular and sustained *meditation* — not just through a process of thinking about it.

THE MORAL PREPARATION FOR DIVINE-KNOWLEDGE

nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyo na medhayā na bahunā śrutena |
yam-evaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyas tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūgum svām || 23 ||

ayam = this; *ātmā* = Supreme being; *na labhyaḥ* = cannot be attained (known); *pravacanena* = through discourse; *na medhayā* = neither through intellectual reasoning; *na bahuna śrutena* = neither by much listening; *yam eva*= he whom; *eṣa vṛṇute* = this One chooses; *tena labhyaḥ* = by him is He attained; *eṣa ātmā* = this Supreme Being; *tasya* = to him; *vivṛṇute* = he reveals; *svām tanuṁ* = His own nature.

23. This Supreme Being cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing. It is to be attained only by the one whom He chooses. To such a one He reveals His own nature.

See M.U. 3. 2.3.

Commentary

While the Supreme Self is impossible to comprehend and is unknowable by our limited conditioned intellect, It is knowable through Its own self-revelation to one whom It chooses. This view looks upon the Supreme Self as personal God and teaches a doctrine of Divine Grace which is Rāmānuja's position.

When we attempt by our own efforts to comprehend the Divine Nature we are frustrated because the *striving* in itself is an obstacle to true realisation. The mental effort fills the mind with impressions (*saṁskāra*), pre-conceived notions, and expectations all based upon our faulty perception of ourselves and the world around us. Since the mind is so filled with thoughts and turbulent, the Self cannot reveal itself; but when the mind is emptied through surrender (*prapatti*) it then becomes a suitable vessel to manifest the divine presence. The "choosing" is not arbitrary or capricious, it is the choosing by the Lord of an empty vessel! The grace of the Lord showers down upon all - but requires the vessel to be receptive. The surrendering of self-effort and struggle is the key to receiving grace.

God dwells with in ātman of each and every being. If one becomes aware of God's presence in the Self, it is due to God's own working in the Self. It is beyond the power of unassisted nature. Human nature is so weak and conditioned by previous *saṁskāras* that it is helpless of itself to help itself. If one is to transform one's lower self and achieve the essential perfection which is one's birth-right, one needs a transforming force from within. All the great mystics have experienced that this force issues not out of one's own self but enters into one from beyond.

Shankara, however, gives a different interpretation by an ingenious exegesis. 'Him alone whom he chooses by that same self is his own self obtainable.' In other words the self reveals its true character to one that seeks it exclusively.

nāvirato duśc̠aritān nāśānto nā̠sa̠māhitaḥ |
nāśānta̠-mānaso vā̠'pi̠ pra̠jñānenaina̠m āpnuyāt || 24 ||

na aviratah = one who has not desisted; *duścaritāt* = from bad conduct, from those acts which are prohibited by Dharma such as causing pain to sentient beings etc; *na aśāntaḥ* = one who is unrestrained [this must apply to the body and senses because shanti or peace is specifically mentioned again in connection with the mind]; *na asamāhitaḥ* = one who does not have the powers of concentration; *vā-api* = or even indeed; *na aśānta-mānasaḥ* = one who does not have a still or peaceful mind [because of excess hankering after the fruits of concentration; *prajñānena* = through profound knowledge [Scriptual learning only]; *āpnuyāt* = can realise; *enam* = this Supreme Truth.

24. One who has not desisted from bad conduct, who is not restrained, nor one without concentration, nor even one whose mind is not still, can know This even though learned beyond compare.

Commentary

In this verse is extolled the moral pre-requisit for the descent of the previously mentioned Saving Grace. Saving Grace cannot be elicited by any means, one cannot co-opt the Divine descent through spiritual bribery such as fasting, making offerings, going on pilgrimages reciting mantras and prayer, all one need do is to prepare the mind/body vessel by the program mentioned in this verse:—

(1) Desist from all those acts which are prohibited by Shastra:—

adrohaḥ sarvabhūteṣu karmaṇā manasā girā |
anugrahaśca dānaṁ ca stāṁ dharma sanātanaḥ ||

The Eternal Duty (Sanatana Dharma) towards all creatures is the absence of malevolence towards them in thought, deed or word, and to practice compassion and charity towards them.

MB Vana Parva 297;35

(2) Cultivate self-restrain — quieten the activities of the senses in pursuit of their respective objects, decrease the hankering for gratification and consumption.

(3) Practice concentration (*pratyahāra*) — this refers to the withdrawl of the mind in the preliminary stages of meditation.

(4) Still the mind through visualization (*dhārana*) according to Patañjali Yoga sūtras the subject for concentration and visualization can be anything which attracts the mind but from a Vaiṣṇava perspective it is one of the forms of the Lord.

No one can realise the truth without illumination, and no one can have illumination without a thorough cleansing of one's moral being. See also M.Up.3:1:5, 3: 1:8; Cp. B.Up. 4: 4:23. As long as we are indulgent to our vices, as long as we exhaust ourselves with hatred and ill-will to others, we cannot attain true knowledge. The classical division of spiritual life into purgation, illumination and union gives the first place to ethical preparation, which is essential for the higher degrees of spiritual life. Moral disorder prevents us from fixing our gaze on the Supreme. Until our minds are effectively purged, we cannot have a clear vision of God. It follows that one's effort is essential to receive Grace and profit by it. Grace is not irresistible. It is open to us to accept or reject it. One should not think that this teaching fosters predestination and determinism; still the spiritual aspirant feels that even in the first movement towards wisdom; the effort at purgation, the prime mover is God.

yasya brahma ca kṣatraṁ ca ubhe bhavata odanaḥ |
mṛtyur yasyopasecanaṁ ka itthā veda yatra saḥ || 25 ||

yasya = That [ātman] for which; *brahma ca kṣatraṁ ca* = the priests who are upholders of Dharma and the Kings who maintain social order; *ubhe* = both of whom; *bhavataḥ* = become; *odanaḥ* = food; yasya = for which [ātman]; *mṛtyuḥ* = Death; though it is the destroyer of everything; *upasecanaṁ* = [is as a] supplement to the food; *kaḥ* = who [devoid of the moral preparation]; *veda* = knows; *itthā* = in this manner; *yatra* = where; *saḥ* = It is?

25. Who really knows where It is? That (Supreme Being) for whom both priesthood and nobility are as food and death is like a curry.

Commentary

Brahma ca kṣatraṁ ca — the entire universe consists of movable (sentient) and immovable (insentient) beings. According to Rāmānuja these two terms are indicative of these two principles. Both these are said to be "food" which means destructable (*vināśyatva*). The person described as the "eater" in this mantra is the Supreme Being (*Paramātman*) who is the ultimate enjoyer and to whom Death is merely a condiment.

The following Sukta from the Rig Veda (10;129) illustrates the impossibility of comprehending the truth with the limited mind;

Who truly knows? Who shall here declare, whence it has been produced, whence this creation? The gods came after the creation of the universe. Who then knows whence it has arisen.

Whence this creation has arisen, and whether He founded it or not; He who in the highest heaven is its Surveyor; He alone knows, or perhaps He knows not.

Anyone lacking the qualifications mentioned in the previous verse cannot understand the nature of the Supreme which contains the whole world nor experience God-realisation. Even the most qualified priests and kings are subject to death and transmigration through Samsāra, and even death itself which destroys all things is finally reabsorbed into the Supreme Self — Paramātma.

The Godhead is by definition omnipresent hence it is futile to speculate *where* It is — space and time have no meaning when considering the Supreme Being. Neither can we know where the liberated jīvas are, for they are not in any one place.
Even Death is absorbed in the Eternal. B.Up. 1 2. 1.

Vaḷḷi 3

It has already been taught that the Eternal Absolute Reality which is greater than anything achieavable in the material or celestial realms can be reached by meditation on one's own inner self and not by ordinary empirical knowledge. This section continues the account of the way in which the Supreme Self may be known.

TWO SELVES

ṛtam pibantau sukṛtasya loke guhām praviṣṭau parame parārdhe |
chāyā-tapau brahma-vido vadanti pañcāgnayo ye ca tri-ṇāciketāḥ || 1 ||

pibantau = [there are] two drinker ie. Experiencers of; *ṛtam* = truth, the results of one's actions; *sukṛtasya* = of what is done by oneself; *praviṣṭau* = these two having entered; *loke* = within the realm ie. The body; *parame guhām* [*guhyāyām*] = into the cavity, into the innermost part of one's being; the intellect; *parārdhe* [*para-ardhe*] = into that which is the abode of brahman [being the space where Brahman is perceived]; *brahma-vidaḥ* = the knowers of Brahman, the theologians; *vadanti* = speak of [these two]; *chāyā-tapau* = as shade and sunlight; *pañcāgnayaḥ* = the worshippers of the five fires ie. The householders; *ye ca* = and they also; *tri-ṇāciketāḥ* = who have thrice piled up the Naciketas fire.

1. There are two selves that enjoy the fruit of Karma in this world of good deeds. Both are lodged in the secret place [of the heart], the principal locus of the Supreme. The knowers of Brahman speak of them as shade and light as also [the householders] who maintain the five sacrificial fires and those too who perform the triple Naciketas fire.

Commentary

The two referred to here are the individual Self (jīvātman) and the Supreme Self (paramātman):—

> Two birds, companions [who are] always united, sit upon the self-same tree. Of these two, the one eats the sweet fruit and the other looks on without eating. (Mundaka Up. 3:1:1. Svetasvatara Up. 4:6)
>
> Two birds with fair wings, knit with the bonds of friendship, in the same sheltering tree have found a refuge. One of the two eats the sweet fig-tree's fruit; the other eating not looks one. (Rig Veda 1.164.20)
>
> Two birds, namely, Īśvara and the Jiva — both conscious entities and both friends through eternity, reside by chance as it were, in the same nest on the same tree of the body. Of these, one bird, the Jiva, eats the fruits of that tree, while the other, Īśvara, though not eating the fruits, thrives splendidly on the same tree. Īśvara, who entertains no desire to eat the fruits of actions, knows His own nature, and that of the other (the world of objects), as *sat-cit-ānanda*. But the Jiva, who claims and enjoys the fruits of actions, knows nothing. Being engulfed in beginningless *avidya* (ignorance), he is ever bound, while Īśvara, who is of the nature of *vidya* (knowledge), is ever liberated. (Srimad Bhagavatam 11:11:6-7)

rtam — Karma. Ṛta signifies the divinely established order of the universe, both natural and moral. It here refers to the divine order connecting deeds with their results. Sankara says that is means 'the truth because it is the inescapable fruit of action.'

sukṛtasya — "in the world of good deeds" of their own deeds (*sva-krtasya*)— the alternative reading is "of what is done by oneself".

All the commentators agree that, of the two, one enjoys the fruit of action (Karma) and the other does not — it only acts as a witness (*sākṣi*). But how can the Self which is represented as looking on without eating, be treated as experiencing the rewards of deeds? The commentators use the analogy of *chattri-nyaya*. When two men walk under

an umbrella, we say "there go the umbrella-bearers", when in fact only *one* is actually carrying the umbrella.

Ramanuja comments; — 'There are two drinking,' etc. shows that, 'as the object of devout meditation (*upāsya*) and the meditator (*upāsaka*) abide together, success in meditation is easily achieved.' (Sri Bhashya. 1. 4. 6)

This verse teaches that meditation on the inner Self (*jīvātman*) leads to the knowledge of the Supreme (*paramātman*) because the latter dwells in close fellowship with the individual self in the cave of the human intelligence.

Madhva is more to the point when he quotes Brhat Samhita and says, 'The Lord Hari dwells in the heart of beings and accepts the pure pleasure arising from their good works.' The Supreme in its cosmic aspect is subject to the chances and changes of times. Īśvara as distinct from Brahman participates in the processes of the world. Madhva finds support in this verse for his doctrine of the absolute separativeness of the individual and the universal Selfs.

parame parārdhe — the principal locus of the Supreme. It is in the deepest reaches of the mind that the Self holds fellowship with God.

chāyā-tapau — "shade and sunlight" or "shadow and glowing light". This can be interpreted to mean the ātman, being the light, is enveloped by shadow which is the mind/body complex. Or it can also mean that the "light" is the *paramātman* and the shadow is the "jīvātman" because it is enveloped in ignorance.

pañcāgnayaḥ: — 'those who maintain the five sacrificial fires'. These are the five daily sacrifices: *deva-yajña* — the offering to the gods, *pitri yajña* — the offering to the ancestors, *brahma yajña* — the offering to the enlightened beings, *manuṣya yajña* — the offering to the guests, *bhūta yajña* — the offering to the environment.

Another teaching contained in this verse is that while meditation is the way to wisdom, due performance of the ordained sacrifices gives us parameters for our spiritual practice.

yas setur ījānānām akṣaraṁ brahma yat param |
abhayam titīrṣatām pāraṁ nāciketaguṁ śakemahi || 2 ||

śakemahi = may we master; *nāciketaṁ* = that Naciketa Vidya; *yaḥ* = which is; *setuḥ* = a bridge [to cross over suffering]; *ījānānām* = of those who sacrifice; *yat* = that is; *akṣaram* = imperishable; *param brahma* = Supreme Self or Reality; *titīrṣatām* = of those who wish to cross; *abhayam* = to the fearless; *pāram* = far shore [of *samsāra*].

2. May we master that Nāciketa Vidya (meditation); which is bridge for those who sacrifice, and which is the highest imperishable Brahman for those who wish to cross over (*saṁsāra*) to the far fearless shore.

Commentary

In this verse we are again shown the two ways. The way to heaven or good future rebirth for the ritualists who faithfully and impeccably perform all their ordained duties and follow Dharma; and the way to Liberation for those who are weary of Samsāra and seek release.

The first — the path of the ritualis prepares the way for the second Brahma-jñānam, on the path of gradual liberation of gradual Liberation — *krama-mukti*. What is being spoken of is that by which we pass from conditioned time to eternity. In the beginning, it is said that the sky and earth were one. They became separated by an intervening sea of conditioned time and space, the ocean of Samsāra (Samsāra Sāgara). Each one of us, wishes to find the way to reach the farther shore by either a ladder or a bridge. If we think of a ladder, the way (*Pantha*) is metaphosically upward: if we conceptualise it as a bridge, the way is across. That which takes us across to the other shore is the immanent *paramātman* which is at once

the way and the goal or Krishna**.** This metaphorical "bridge" holds the worlds apart and also unites them.

Now the Self is the bridge, the separating boundary for keeping these worlds apart. Chandogya Up. 8.4.1.

See BU.4.4.22, 7.4.1.

THE PARABLE OF THE CHARIOT

ātmānaguṁ rathinaṁ viddhi śarīraguṁ ratham eva tu ।
buddhiṁ tu sārathiṁ viddhi manaḥ pragraham eva ca ॥ 3 ॥

viddhi = know that; *ātmānaṁ* = the Self [the enjoyer of the fruits of karma]; *rathinaṁ* = is the rider of the chariot; *śarīraṁ* = the body; *ratham eva* = is indeed the chariot; *tu* = and; *buddhiṁ* = the intellect [characterised by determination]; *viddhi* = know [to be]; *sārathiṁ* = the charioteer; *manaḥ* = the mind [characterised by volition and doubt]; *pragraham* = is the bridle.

3. Know the Self as the lord of the chariot and the body as, verily, the chariot, know the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as the reins.

indriyāṇi hayāṇ āhur viṣayāṁs teṣu gocarān ।
ātmendriya-mano-yuktam bhoktety āhur manīṣiṇah ॥ 4 ॥

indriyāni = the senses; *āhuḥ* = they say [are]; *hayān* = the horse; *teṣu* = they [the senses]; *viṣayāṁ* = the objects of the senses; *gocarān* = the paths, roads; *ātma-indriya-mano-yuktam* = the Self associated with the body; ie. Having the 5 senses and the mind as the 6th; *bhoktā* = is the enjoyer, experiencer; *iti* = thus; *āhuḥ* = declare; *manīṣiṇah* = the wise ones, the enlightened ones, the sages.

4. The senses, they say, are the horses; the objects of enjoyment the paths [they range over];[the Self] associated with the body; [comprised of] the senses and the mind - the enlightened ones declare - is the enjoyer.

Commentary

The metaphor of the Self riding in the chariot which is the psycho-physical vehicle is a common one. See also Jātaka VI.242. The chariot with its sensitive steeds represents the vehicle of the body/mind complex in which the Self rides. In Maitri Up. 4:4, the embodied self is spoken of as *rathita* or 'carted' and thus subjected to the conditions of mortality. The five horses are the senses which are linked by the reins which are the mind. All the data collected by the senses is presented to the mind which collates it and hands it over to the intellect, acting as the charioteer. The conception of "Yoga" derived from the root *yuj* 'to yoke', 'to harness', 'to join' is connected with this symbolism of the chariot and horses.

The same symbolism is evident in the Bhagavad Gita where the highest teaching is delivered in a chariot. Yoga is the complete control and integration of the mental and physical sides of our being and directing them to the highest goal which is liberation from saṁsāra.

yastu avijñānavān bhavaty ayuktena manasā sadā ।
tasyendriyāṇy avaśyāni duṣṭāśvā iva sāratheḥ ॥ 5 ॥

5. The senses of one who has no insight, whose mind is always unrestrained, are out of control, as unruly horses are for a charioteer.

Yaḥ tu = but that [intellect]; *bhavati* = becoming; *avijñānavān* = unskilful, having no insight and discrimination; *sadā* = being always; *ayuktena manasā* = with an uncontrolled or undisciplined mind;

tasya = his; *indriyāṇi* = the senses; *avaśyāni* = uncontrollable; *duṣṭāśvā iva* = like unruly horses; *sāratheḥ* = of the charioteer.

Commentary

This is the description of default human state — an uncontrolled mind, leading to the lack of discipline in restraining the senses and their associated desires and cravings which leads to a rampant pursuit of sense-gratification and unbridled consumption resulting invariably in suffering. Because of this crazy journey one does not develop insight and wisdom and conversely — because one has no insight, one continues in the same path to self-destruction and further suffering in Samsāra.

> For, when the mind follows the senses — experiencing their objects, the understanding is carried away by them as the wind carries away a ship on the waters. Therefore, O mighty-armed one, he whose senses are restrained from pursuing sense gratification in every way, his wisdom is firmly established. (Gita 2: 67. 68).

yastu vijñānavān bhavati yuktena manasā sadā |
tasyendriyāṇi vaśyāni sadaśvā iva sāratheḥ || 5 ||

yaḥ tu = but that [intellect]; *bhavati* = becoming; *vijñānavān* = skilful, having insight and discrimination; *sadā* = being always; *yuktena manasā* = with a controlled or disciplined mind; *tasya* = his; *indriyāṇi* = the senses; *vaśyāni* = controllable; *sat aśvā iva* = like well-behaved horses; *sāratheḥ* = of the charioteer.

6. However, one who has insight, whose mind is always restrained; his senses are under control, as good horses are for a charioteer.

Commentary

This is the description of ideal spiritual state, achieved through constant practice and development (*abhyāsa yoga*) — (1) achieving insight and wisdom. (2) leading to a controlled mind, (3) resulting in disciplined senses or self-control and freedom from suffering here and now.

> There is no right disposition (Buddhi) for the un-integrated, for him there is no contemplation on the Atman, and for one without contemplation on the Atman there is no peace; and for one lacking peace where is happiness? (Gita 2:66)

yas tv avijñānavān bhavaty amanaskas sadā'śuciḥ |
na sa tat padam āpnoti saṁsāraṁ cādhigacchati || 7 ||

yaḥ tu = but that [intellect]; *bhavati* = becoming; *avijñānavān* = unskilful, having no insight and discrimination; *amanaskaḥ* = whose mind is uncontrolled; *sadā* = always; *aśuciḥ* = impure; *saḥ* = he, that person; *na* = does not; *āpnoti* = obtain; *tat* = that; *padam* = goal; *ca* = and/but; *adhigacchati* = obtains, reaches; *saṁsāraṁ* = worldly existence.

7. One, however, who has no insight, who has no control over the mind (and is) ever impure, reaches not that goal but returns to saṁsāra.

Commentary

Now Yama is describing what happens to one who does not achieve the ideal — it is continual return to Saṁsāra — the ocean of becoming characterised by life and death.

The three negative characteristics described in this verse relate to the three ideals posited in verse 6. So the term "impure" must correspond with the lack of physical discipline and restraint of the senses resulting in unskilful acts and their consequence. The six impurities of mind are *kāṁā* = self-referant desire, *krodha* = anger, *moha* = delusion (mistaking the body for the Self), *mada* = arrogance, *lobha* = greed, and *mātsarya* = malicious envy.

yas tu vijñānavān bhavati samanaskas sadā śuciḥ ।
sa tu tat padam āpnoti yasmād bhūyo na jāyate ॥ 8 ॥

yaḥ tu = but that [intellect]; *bhavati* = becoming; *vijñānavān* = skilful, having insight and discrimination; *sa-manaskaḥ* = whose mind is controlled; *sadā* = always; *śuciḥ* = pure; *saḥ* = he, that person; *tu* = but, indeed; *āpnoti* = obtains; *tat* = that; *padam* = goal; *yasmāt* = whence; *na* = not, never; *bhūyaḥ* = again; *jāyate* = is born.

8. One, however, who has insight, who has controlled the mind and is ever pure, reaches that goal from which one is not born again.

Commentary

Once discriminating awareness arises and insight is gained through faith in the teachings and constant reflection upon suffering and joy, the real and the unreal, the permanent and the impermanent etc. the mind can be easily controlled. With a controlled mind one can then restrain the senses and cultivate discipline. One's action will then become "pure" which means beneficial for others leading to work for the benefit of all sentient beings.

"Indeed, you should act, bearing in mind the welfare of the world". (Gita 3:20)

Such an individual becomes fit for achieving the highest goal.

vijñāna sārathir yastu manaḥ pragrahavān naraḥ ।
so'dhvanaḥ pāram āpnoti tad viṣṇoḥ paramam padam ॥ 9 ॥

yaḥ naraḥ tu = that person who; *vijñāna* = insight; *sārathiḥ* = as the charioteer; *manaḥ pragrahavān* = with the mind as the reins; *saḥ* = he; *āpnoti* = reaches, attains; *adhvanaḥ pāram* = the final destination; *tat* = that; *paramam* = is the supreme; *padam* = place/state; *viṣṇoḥ* = of Vishnu.

9. One who has insight for the driver of the chariot and controls the rein of the mind, reaches the end of the journey, that supreme abode of the all-pervading Vishnu.

THE ORDER OF PROGRESSION TO THE SUPREME

indriyebhyaḥ parā hyarthā arthebhyaś ca param manaḥ ।
manasaś ca parā buddhir buddher ātmā mahān paraḥ ॥ 10 ॥

arthāḥ = the objects; *parā hi* = are higher indeed; *indriyebhyaḥ* = than the sense-organs; *param ca* = and superior *arthebhyaḥ* = to the sense-objects; *manaḥ* = is the mind; *parā ca* = and higher still; *manasaḥ* = than the mind; *buddhiḥ* = is the intellect; *paraḥ* = higher; *buddheḥ* = than the intellect; *ātmā mahān* = is the Great Self.

10. Beyond the sense-organs are the objects and beyond the objects is the mind; beyond the mind is the understanding and beyond the understanding is the Great Self.

Commentary

The order of gradual inversion from the external world is being discussed. We experience the presence and power of the five sense-organs, we then reflect upon our perception of their objects and the relevance that we give them. We then reflect upon the mind that collates the data, we then progress to the contemplation of the intellect, to the process of understanding the thinking process itself. Once we transcend this state of thinking about thinking we can then perceive the Self as it is.

arthāḥ = the "things" of the senses that have no meaning in themselves but the meaning that we give them.

Great Self = Shankara means by it the great “Self of the universe” said to be the firstborn of the Unmanifest. According to the RX. (X.121) in the beginning was the chaos of waters, floating on which appeared Hiranya-garbha, the golden germ, the first born of creation and the creator of all other human beings. Hiranya-garbha is the Self of the Universe. RV.X.129.2.

For Ramanuja the *Great Self* is the individual Self or the subject of all experience which is indwelt by the Highest Self.

Cp. Deussen: 'We know that the entire objective universe is possible only insofar as it is sustained by a knowing subject. This subject as the sustainer of the objective universe is manifested in all individual subjects but is by no means identical with them. For the individual subjects pass away, but the objective universe continues to exist without them; there exists therefore the eternal knowing subject (*Hiranya-garbha*) also by whom it is sustained. (The Philosophy of the Upanisads, p. 201).

mahataḥ paraṃ avyaktam avyaktāt puruṣaḥ paraḥ |
puruṣān na paraṁ kiñcit sā kāṣṭhā sā parā gatiḥ || 11 ||

param = beyond; *mahataḥ* = the Great Self; *avyaktam* = is the Unmanifest; *paraḥ* = higher; *avyaktāt* = than the Unmanifest; *puruṣaḥ* = is That which fills the Entire Universe, the Supreme being; *puruṣāt* = than the Purusha; *na paraṁ kiñcit* = there is nothing higher; *sā kāṣṭhā* = the acme, the culmination; *sā* = that is; *parā gatiḥ* = the final, ultimate Goal.

11. Beyond the Great Self is the Unmanifest; beyond the Unmanifest is the Purusha (that which fills the universe). Beyond that Purusha there is nothing higher. That is the end (of the journey); that is the final goal.

Commentary

The Unmanifest. It is beyond *mahat* or the Self, it is *prakṛti*, the universal mother Nature from out of which, by the influence of the light of *purusa*, all form and all content emerge into manifestation.

Shankara suggests that the "Unmanifest” is the latent state of the whole universewhen name and form are unmanifested. The state when all forces of cause and effect are in a latent condition prior to manifestation. It is the same as *Māyā* – Illusion and *Avidya* – ignorance. *Puruṣa* (That which fills, or the Supreme Person) is the subject, *Prakṛti* or material nature is the object, both are co-ordinate principles at the stage of cosmic creation, while their inter-action is essential for all manifestation, *Puruṣa* is considered to be higher as he is the source of light and his unit appears nearer to the Ultimate One than the multiplicity of *Prakrti*; strictly speaking, however, the Pure Self is beyond the descriptions of unity, duality and multiplicity.

For Shankara, the “Unmanifest” here is not the Prakṛti or Primordial Nature of the Sankhya System but the *māyā-śakti* which is responsible for the whole world including the personal God. For Ramanuja, *Unmanifest* denotes the Brahman in its causal phase, when names and forms are not yet distinguished. It is a real mode, *prakāra* or development, a real transformation of Brahman through which the universe is evolved and comes into being.

The Puruṣa – The term Puruṣa goes back to the Puruṣa Sukta (R.V. X. 90) where it is used in a distinctly personal way. The Ultimate Reality or Brahman contains all possibilities of manifestation and non-manifestation of both subject and object, both the light of unity and the darkness of multiplicity – Puruṣa is the subjective side of that Brahman. We do not reach it, until the end of the cosmic day when the entire universe is reabsorbed into Brahman. So from this point of view we can say that there is nothing beyond the Puruṣa.

> In these two verses we find a hierarchy of principles which have later acquired highly technical significations. We are asked to pass from outward nature to the one world-ground, the Unmanifest (*avyakta/prakṛti*), and from it to the spirit (*Puruṣa*) behind. Between the two, Puruṣa and Prakṛti, a certain priority is given to Puruṣa, for it is the light of Puruṣa's consciousness that is reflected on all objects of the manifested universe high or low, gross or subtle. From the world of sense experience where the senses reveal their objects, we pass to the dream world where mind operates independent of the senses. From here we pass to the world of dreamless sleep where the Unmanifest becomes the divine mother. Those who are absorbed in *Prakṛti*, have the bliss and freedom of dreamless sleep, but it is not the illuminated freedom that we seek. For that we must realise the Puruṣa, which is the source of all.

The Dualistic Sankhyan Theory of Evolution

Mahat, *Avyakta* and *Puruṣa* are terms used by the Sankhya philosophy. *Avyakta* (unmanifest) is the Prakrti comprised of the three forces of *Rajas* = activity, *Tamas* = inertia and *Sattva* = harmony and balance. When the equilibrium of these three forces is disturbed by the influence of Puruṣa (consciousness), the evolution of the manifest universe starts, and this evolution consists of twenty-four principles.

1. *Mahat*, the Great Principle which is the cosmic volition – the first seed of desire which activates the other processes. It includes within it the notion of *buddhi* or intelligence which in the Sankhya system is understood to be the capacity to expand, reveal, and ascertain, it does not refer to thinking or the creation of ideas, relationship, or identity.

2. *ahaṅkāra* = the ego-sense, principle of individuation from which issue:–

3. *manas* = the central, co-ordinatory sense-organ, the principle of cognition.

4. – 9, five sensory organs,

10 – 14, five organs of action,

15 – 19, five subtle elements,

20 – 24, five gross elements; earth, fire, water, air & ether.

Purusha, the twenty-fifth, is totally distinct in nature from all others, neither producing nor produced, though by its influence on Prakrti, it kick-starts the evolution of the manifest world.

The account given here in the Katha Up. is different from the classical Sankhya in many respects; there is no mention of *ahaṅkāra* or ego-sense, though it is taught in Sankhya that all the components arise simultaneously and that the distinction between *buddhi* and *ahaṅkāra*, intellect and individuation is simply for comprehending the concept.

The puruṣa of the dualistic Sankhya is not "beyond" the Avyakta or Prakrti but is a co-ordinate principle, and so it is doubtful that the Avyakta referred to here is exactly the same as the Sankhyan theory of Prakrti. This account presents certain Sankhya concepts in a theistic setting.

> Gita 3:42. It is said that the senses are superior [to the body]: the mind is superior to the senses; the intellect is higher than the mind; but what is greater than intellect is that[2] [the desire-nature].

THE METHOD OF YOGA

eṣa sarveṣu bhūteṣu gūḍho'tmā na prakāśate |

---

[2] Sankara takes 'that' to refer to the Self — but this is inconsonant with the context of this discourse about the enemy which is to be vanquished!

dṛśyate tvagryayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣma-darśibhih || 12 ||

eṣa = this; *ātmā* = Self; *gūḍhaḥ* = is hidden; sarveṣu *bhūteṣu* = in all beings; *na* = it does not; *prakāśate* = does not shine forth, it is not the content of conventional thinking; *tu* = but; *dṛśyate* = it can be seen, realised; *sūkṣma-darśibhih* = by those who can conceive of subtle, abstract concepts; *buddhyā* = by the intellect; *agryayā* = which is sharp, pointed; *sūkṣmayā* = and subtle.

12. The Self, though hidden in all beings, is not apparent. But can be conceived by those subtle seers, through their sharp and subtle intelligence.

Commentary

The Self which is within our innermost being cannot be revealed by conventional thinking using gross concepts and ideation. It must be realised through subtle and abstract means and only after the mental purification and self-control mentioned earlier. It is apprehended through *samyag-darśana* = perfect insight.

yacched vāṅ manasī prājñas tad yacchej jñāna-ātmani |
jñānam ātmani mahati niyacchet tad-yacchecchānta-ātmani || 13 ||

prājñaḥ = the wise one, endowed with discriminating wisdom; *yacchet* = should merge; *vāk* = speech [representing all the organs]; *manasī* = in the mind; *tat* = that [mind]; *yacchet* = should merge; *jñāna-ātmani* = in the intellect; [which is the "self" as it were of all the organs]; *jñānam* = the intellect; *niyacchet* = should be dissolved; *mahati ātmani* = in the Great Self, the First Born - Hiranyagarbha; *tat* = that ; *yacchet* = should be merged; *śānta-ātmani* = into the tranquil Self = the Ocean of Great Peace.

13. One endowed with intuitive wisdom should restrain speech in mind; the mind should be merged into the intellect. The intellect should be merged into the Collective Self. That, one should then merge into the Tranquil Self.

Commentary

The process of Yogic meditation by concentration and introversion is being taught here. "Speech" is indicative of all externalised activity of the senses and their interaction with the world around us — "speech restrained in mind" it is the first stage of the meditative process called *pratyahāra* (withdrawl) by Patañjali. The next stage is *dhāraṇa* or concentration, described poetically as "merging the mind into the intellect" where our conventional concept of self is found. In Tantra methodology this stage is practiced by the use of images and visualizations of deities. *Dhyāna* or meditation proper commences when the conventional self is dissolved in the realisation of the True Self. *Samādhi* = absorption or enstacy happens when the individual self is merged into the Supreme Self. In this highest state of peace there is no longer the conceptual differentiation between subject, object and the perception. Thus by shutting out all external things and emptying the mind of all distracting thought flow, one is able to concentrate on one's own deepest aspect of being. Hiranyagarbha is the universal "collective self"

Śānta-ātman is Puruṣa the Absolute or the Godhead. The Yogi must go beyond all mental images, all intellectual concepts, and by a gradual process of refined abstraction, one achieves self-realisation and experiences union with the Godhead in whom are perfect peace and fullness of being. The insightful practitioner learns to discriminate the unchanging subjective, inner light, the *ātman*, from the ever-changing objects of sense perception and the mind which it illumines – the conventional self which is *an-ātman* (non-self).

uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata |
kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti || 14 ||

uttiṣṭhata = arise; *jāgrata* = awake, be vigilant; *prāpya varān* = having obtained the boons, *nibodhata* = realise, comprehend them; *kṣurasya dhārā* = like the edge of a razor; *niśitā* = being sharpened; *duratyayā* = impassable; *kavayaḥ* = the seers, poets, enlightened ones; *vadanti* = declare; *durgam* = difficult to traverse; *tat* = is that; *pathaḥ* = path.

14. Arise, awake, having obtained your boons, realise (them). Sharp as the edge of a razor and hard to cross, difficult to tread is that path (so) sages declare.

Commentary.

This is the clarion call to all slumbering jivas in Samsara! In this verse while inviting potential aspirants to being the journey back to Godhead, Lord Yama also declares the fundamental truth that the spiritual path of self-transformation is as sharp as the edge of a razor. It is the razor sharp path which can lead to our own destruction if we do not maintain perpetual vigilance. The way of spiritual practice and development is never easy and every novice must be disabused of any delusions regarding the comfort of spiritual life. The path to the summit is steep and hard and beset with danger, disappointments and setbacks. Self-discipline is the first step in spiritual training and is only accomplished with the greatest determination and effort. The spiritual path is the path of the warrior.

na ayam ātma balahīnena labhya - this ātma cannot be obtained by the weak.

prāpya varān: can mean either having attained the boons that you requested or as interpreted by Shankara = 'approaching the best of teachers.' *prāpya* = having approached, *varān* = the best [of teachers].

Cp. Hitopadeśa: Idleness is the great enemy of here of humans, *ālasyaṁ hi manuṣyānāṁ śarīrastho mahā-ripuḥ.*

a̱śabdaṃ a̱sparśam a̱rūpam avyayam tathā 'rasaṁ ni̱tyam agandhavac ca yat |
a̱nādy-anantam ma̱hataḥ paraṁ dhru̱va̱ṁ ni̱cāyya tam mṛ̱tyu-mukhāt pramucyate ||
15 ||

Nicāyya = realising, *tam* = that (Self) that is: *aśabdam* = non-sound, soundless; *asparśam* = touchless, *arūpam* = formless; *avyayam* = undiminishing, undecaying and therefore eternal; *tathā* = and also; *arasaṁ* = tasteless; *nityam* = eternal; *agandhavat* = odourless; *ca yat* = and which *anādi* = beginningless; *anantam* = endless; *mahataḥ paraṁ* = higher than the principle of intelligence; *dhruvaṁ* = stable, constant; *pramucyate* = one is liberated; = from the mouth of death.

15. One is freed from the mouth of death by discerning that (*Paramātman* – through meditation) which is devoid of sound, beyond touch and without form, undecaying, which is likewise, tasteless, eternal, odourless, without beginning & without end, distinct from *mahat* (jīva), ever constant.

Commentary

This verse can be interpreted from the point of view of the Jīvātman or the Paramātman. The Jīvātman is not an object but is the eternal subject perceiving all objects. We are the *ātman* and we hear, touch, see, feel, smell and think with the mind — often referred to as the "lesser self" or *"gauṇa ātman"*. By withdrawing the attention through the practice of meditation, from the external world, by retreating into the ground of our being, in the deepest depth of the Self, we meet the Infinite and realise our essence and immortality. Death no longer has any meaning.

The theological interpretation takes the term *Mahat* to refer to the *Jīvātman.* The meaning would thus be that one who surrenders to the Lord who is beyond the grasp of the senses or the mind's ability to conceptualise, is liberated from the cycle of Saṁsāra.

nāciketam upākhyānaṁ mṛtyu-proktaguṁ sanātanam |
uktvā śrutvā ca medhāvī brahma-loke mahīyate || 16 ||

uktvā = telling, relating; *ca śrutvā* = and listening to; *upākhyānam sanātanam* = the eternal anecdote; *nāciketam* = of naciketas; *mṛtyu-proktaṁ* = spoken to by Death; *medhāvī* = the intelligent person; *mahīyate* = is magnified, glorified; *brahma-loke* = in the world of Brahma.

16. Relating and hearing this eternal anecdote of Naciketas, taught by Death, an intelligent person is glorified in the world of Brahma.

ya imaṁ paramaṁ guhyaṁ śrāvayed brahma-saṁsadi | prayataḥ śrāddha-kāle vā tad ānantyāya kalpate | tad ānantyāya kalpatā iti || 17 ||

yaḥ = whoever; *śrāvayed* = causes to be recited; *imam* = this; *paramaṁ guhyaṁ* = supreme secret doctrine; *brahma-saṁsadi* = in an assembly of brahmins; *prayataḥ* = after becoming purified; *vā* = or; *śrādddha-kāle* = at the time of the ceremonies for the dead; *tat* = that funeral ceremony; *kalpate* = becomes conducive; *ānantyāya* = to an eternal result.

17. Whoever shall arrange the recitation of this supreme secret before an assembly of Brahmanas after purification, or devoutly at the time of the ceremonies for the dead, this will prepare (him for) eternity.

Commentary

Often at the end of a hymn or dissertation the fruit of listening is mentioned (*phala-śruti*) — this is known in Mīmāṁsa as *artha-vāda* and the purpose is only for incentivisation and not a statement of fact.

The immense merit declared can either be attributed to the funeral ceremony (*śrāddha*) itself at which the recitation takes place, or it can be said to accrue to the arranger of the recitation.

This seems to be the appropriate ending of the Upanishad and the second chapter with the three sections, is, perhaps, a later addition.

Dvitīyo'dhyāyaḥ
Valli 4

THE SELF IS NOT TO BE SOUGHT THROUGH THE SENSES

parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūs- tasmāt parāṅ paśyati nāntarātman |
kaścid dhīraḥ pratyag-ātmānam aikṣad āvṛtta-cakṣur amṛtatvam icchan || 1 ||

svayambhūḥ = the self-born Being; *parāñci* = outgoing; *khāni* = the orifices; *vyatṛṇat* = pierced; *tasmāt* = therefore; *paśyati* = one looks; *parāk* = outwards; *na antarātman* = not within oneself; *kaścit dhīraḥ* = some [rare] wise discriminating person; *icchan* = desiring; *amṛtatvam* = immortality, one's true nature, freedom from suffering; *āvṛtta-cakṣuḥ* = turned the gaze inward, looked within the mind; *pratyak-ātmānam* = the indwelling Self; *aikṣat* = saw.

1. The self-existent Lord pierced the openings [of the senses] outward; therefore one looks outward and not within oneself. Some wise person, however, desiring immortality, turned the gaze inward, and saw the indwelling Self.

Commentary

The Self-caused Lord of all has set the default function of the senses to operate outwards and thus all people naturally look outward into the objective world but the rare individual, being oppressed by Samsāra begins a process of introspection. Withdrawing the attention from the phenomenal world, one turns the eye inward seeking the noumenon, the ground of being and then attains immortality.

Shankara makes out that the Lord cursed or "killed" the senses by turning them outward. Shankara's opinion is opposed to the tone of the previous section in which the senses are said to be like horses, which will take us to our goal, if properly guided. The Upaniṣad calls for the control and not the repression of the senses. The spiritual quest is an inward movement leading to the discovery of the Divine in the inmost Self. It is this introspective process which is being stressed in this verse.

See S.U. 3:18, God is more manifest in the Self than in the external world of experience. In order to achieve enlightenment we must bring about an inversion of the natural orientation of our consciousness.

parācaḥ kāmān anuyanti bālās te mṛtyor yanti vitatasya pāśam |
atha dhīrā amṛtatvaṁ viditvā dhruvam adhruveṣv iha na prārthayante || 2 ||

bālāḥ = the children, immature people; *anuyanti* = they pursue; *parācaḥ kāmān* = the external objects of desire; *te* = they; *yanti* = become entangled; *pāśam* = in the noose, snare; *mṛtyoḥ* = of death; *vitatasya* = spread far and wide everywhere; *atha* = hence; *dhīrāḥ* = those who are wise and discriminating; *viditvā* = having known; *amṛtatvaṁ* = the immortality; *na prārthayante* = do not aspire after or pray for; *dhruvam* = the abiding, stable, permanent; *adhruveṣu* = in that which is impermanent; *iha* = here is this samsāra.

2. The childish pursue outward pleasures. They become entangled in the snare of ever-present death. The wise, however, aware of immortality, do not seek permanence in things which are impermanent.

yena rūpaṁ rasaṁ gandhaṁ śabdān sparśāṁś ca maithunān |
etenaiva vijānāti kim atra pariśiṣyate | etad vai tat || 3 ||

yena = that by which; *vijānāti* = know clearly; *rūpaṁ* = colour; *rasaṁ* = taste; *gandhaṁ* = smell; *śabdām* = sound; *sparśāṁ* = touch; *ca* = and; *maithunān* = pleasure derived from sex; *etena eva* = through this [Self] only; *kim* = what; *atra* = in this world; *pariśiṣyate* = remains; *etat vai tat* = this is indeed that.

3. That by which [one perceives] form, taste, smell, sounds and sexual pleasure, by that alone one perceives. What is there that remains [unknown to it]? This [self], verily, is that [which is attainable].

Commentary

Everything is known by the Self and there is nothing which is unknowable to it. Though the Self is not perceptable as an object, it is ever present in all experience as the cognising subject. It is the ground of every possibility of thought, of every act of knowledge. As Shankara says, the Self or ātman is "self-proven", *svasiddha*; for even one who denies the Self presupposes it — otherwise what is there to deny?

Rāmānuja interprets this verse as follows:— "One knows fully everything on account of the Paramātman alone. The sense organs that mediate colour and the other perceptions can only function when permitted by the Paramātman. *Etad-vai-tat* is that Supreme abode of Viṣṇu which was declared as a goal of attainment. It is this alone - namely the essential nature of the Supreme Self."

svapnāntaṁ jāgaritāntaṁ cobhau yenānupaśyati |
mahāntaṁ vibhum ātmānam matvā dhīro na śocati || 4 ||

yena = That by which; *anupaśyati* = one perceives; *svapnāntaṁ* = the content of dreams; *jāgaritāntaṁ* = the content of the waking state; *ca-ubhau* = both of them; *matvā* = having realised; *mahāntaṁ* = the great; *vibhum* = all-pervading; *ātmānam* = Self; *dhīraḥ* = the wise person; *na śocati* = does not grieve.

4. Having meditated uponthe great omnipresent Self (*paramātma*), that by which one perceives both dream states and waking states, the wise one does not grieve.

Commentary

Dream states — Literally 'dream-end'. It is sometimes suggested that at the end of a dream, before one is waking or sleeping we catch the self which is the pure subject. It is the state of awareness when we know that we dream.

The understanding of this concept of levels of consciousness should not be limited to mere waking and dreaming. The waking phase (*jāgrata*) is our cognitive interaction with the external world. The "dream" state (*svapna*) is the phase of our inner world of feeling, emotions, fears, all our samskaras etc. The third phase of "dreamless" sleep (*suṣupti*) is absence of the subject-object dichotomy. It is the phase of "no-mind" or the void in Buddhist terminology.

THE INDIVIDUAL SELF, ETC., ARE ONE WITH THE 'UNIVERSAL

ya imam madhvadaṁ veda ātmānaṁ jīvam antikāt |
īśānam bhūta-bhavyasya na tato vijugupsate | etad vai tat || 5 ||

yaḥ = anyone who; *veda* = knows; *antikāt* = proximity; *imam* = this; *ātmānaṁ* = Self; *jīvam* = the sustainer of the vital energies; *madhvadaṁ* = the enjoyer of the results of actions; *īśānam* = the ruler; *bhūta-bhavyasya* = of the past and the future [and also the present]; *tataḥ* = thereafter [knowing which]; *na vijugupsate* = fears nothing (shrinks away from); *etat vai tat* = this is indeed that.

5. One who knows this Self [jīvātman], the experiencer of the results of actions, as the supporter of life, close at hand, and the Lord of the past and the future – fears nothing. This, verily, is that.

Commentary

Rāmānuja reads in this verse the mention of *jīvātman* as the enjoyer and the *paramātman* as the Lord of the past and the future. One who has realised this metaphysical truth should never be despised even though he may have been the doer of negative deeds in the past.

madhu-ada = the experiencer. Literally, "honey-eater" = 'the enjoyer of the fruit of action.'

na-vijigupsate = lit. 'does not shrink away from.' Does not want to save himself because he has attained the state of perfect fearlessness. One feels the need for Self-protection as long as one thinks that the Self is mortal and impermanent. Once the true realisation of its being is attained then what would one try to save and from whom?

yaḥ pū̱rvaṁ tapa̍so jā̱tam a̍dbhyaḥ pū̱rvam a̍jāyata ।
gu̱hām pra̱viśya̍ tiṣṭha̱ntam yo̱ bhūte̍bhir vya̱paśya̍ta । e̱tad vai tat ॥ 6 ॥

yaḥ = anyone [desirous of liberation] who; *vyapaśyata* = sees; *pūrvaṁ jātam* = the First-born (Hiranyagarbha); *yaḥ* = who; *ajāyata* = was born; *tapasaḥ* = from austerity [contemplation]; *pūrvam* = earlier; *adbhyaḥ* = than water; *bhūtebhiḥ* = associated with the elements; *guhām praviśya* = having entered into the heart of all beings; *tiṣṭhantam* = exists; *etat vai tat* = this is indeed That.

6. One who sees the First-Born (Hiraṇya-garbha); born before the waters and the other elements, from consciousness; who exists, having entered the secret place [the heart/mind of all beings] and looked forth through beings. This, verily, is that.

Commentary

This text refers to the Puruṣa = *Hiranya-garbh*a, who is mentioned in several Upanishads and the Vedas. Hiranya-garbha means the "Golden Embryo" and refers to the common form of all the individual jīvas in the universe – the "collective self'. It is the seed of creation, the "*sutrātma"* or that which pervades and links everything together in a web of inter-connectedness.

Hiranyagarbha arose in the beginning; born, he was the One lord of things existing. Rig Veda 10:121:1

The Golden Embryo is also the principle of all vibration and movement which arises in consciousness. It expresses itself in the form of vibrating energy. It divides itself into the totality of all possible potentialities (the causal waters = *rayi*) and the Breath-of-life (*prāṇa*) = Illustrated as the wind that creates waves in the causal ocean from which all forms develop.

The "waters" symbolise the *mūla-prakrti*, the aspect of the Supreme Being which remains when the universe is dissolved into the source. In iconography it is represented by the Milk-ocean upon which Lord Vishnu floats reclining upon the serpent named "The-remnant-of-infinity" = Ananta-śeṣa.

Rāmānuja considers the "First-Born" to be Brahmā the creator and not the Self. Brahmā is controlled and directed by the paramātman i.e. Viṣṇu.

yā prāne̍na sambha̱vaty adi̍tir deva̱tāma̍yī । gu̱hām pra̱viśya̍ tiṣṭha̱ntīṁ yā̱ bhūte̍bhir vyajā̱yata̍ । e̱tad vai tat ॥ 7 ॥

yā aditiḥ = That Aditi; *devatāmayī* = comprising all the gods; *sambhavati* = is born, arises; *prāṇena* = with the life-force; *guhām* = in the secret place; *praviśya* = having entered; *tiṣṭhantī* = exists; *yā* = which; *bhūtebhiḥ* = in association with the beings or elements; *vyajāyata* = took birth; *etad vai tat* = this is indeed That.

7. She who arises with life (prāṇa), Aditi, the Mother of the gods, who exists, having entered the secret place [of the heart], who was born with beings, This, verily, is that.

Commentary

aditir dyaur aditir antarikṣaṃ aditir mātā sa pita sa putraḥ |
viśvedevāḥ aditi pañca-janā aditir jātam aditir janitvam ||

'Aditi is the sky, Aditi the air, Aditi is mother, father and son, Aditi is all the gods and the five tribes, Aditi is whatever has been and will be born.'. (Rig Veda 1:89:10).

Aditi is the pure self-luminous consciousness; she is the Mother of the gods and all beings, the source of all objectivity. Aditi is the undivided unifying principle of all things, free from duality of subject/object cognition. She gives birth to Daksha Prajapati, the discriminating and reasoning faculty of the divine Mind, and is herself born to Daksha as the Surabhi Cow whose milk nourishes all the worlds. It is this divine daughter of Daksha who is the mother of the gods. Her sister is Diti the separative, divided, dual consciousness — she is the mother of the Daityas or anti-gods. In a more general aspect Aditi is the source of all the cosmic forms of consciousness from the physical upwards.

Rāmānuja interprets *Aditi* to be refering to the individual jīvātman (karma-phalāni attīti aditiḥ — Aditi is that which experiences *atti* the results of Karma). It resides in the cavity of the heart with the prāṇas and the other senses which are known as the "devas." *Etad-vai-tat* — refers to the Paramātman which is the over-self of the individual Self.

araṇyor nihito jāta-vedā garbha iva subhṛto garbhiṇībhiḥ | dive diva īḍyo jāgṛvadbhir haviṣmadbhir manuṣyebhir agniḥ | etad vai tat || 8 ||

jāta-vedāḥ = Agni, the omniscient one; *nihitaḥ* = is hidden; *araṇyoḥ* = in the two fire-sticks; *subhṛtaḥ* = well-protected; *garbha iva* = like a foetus; *garbhiṇībhiḥ* = by pregnant women; *agniḥ* = that Agni; *īḍyaḥ* = is worthy of adoration or contemplation; *dive dive* = every day; *manuṣyebhiḥ* = by those human beings; *jāgṛvadbhiḥ* = who are awake, vigilant, mindful, aware; *haviṣmadbhiḥ* = through oblations or contemplation; *etad vai tat* = this is indeed That.

8. Agni, the all-knower, concealed in the fire-sticks, like the foetus well protected by pregnant women, should be daily adored by the vigilant ones with oblations. This, verily, is that.

This verse is quoted from Sama Veda I.1.8.7; see also R.V. III. 29. 2.

Commentary

Aranis = The fire sticks. The sacrificial fire – Agni – is kindled by rubbing two pieces of wood together in a churning fashion. These two *aranis* can be taken metaphorically to be referring to both Puruṣa (consciousness) and Prakṛti (material Nature), the subject and the object – they are identified with the Supreme Reality as they are two movements of His being whence all the creation arises.

Agni is the most important and the most universal of Vedic gods. In the physical world he is the "All-devourer" or experiencer. He is also the purifier through his devouring – by consumption he purifies all things. He is the medium that prepares and perfects; he is also the agent of assimilation and the producer of energy. He is the dynamic life energy and creates the essence (*rasa*) of all things, the essence of their substantial being and the essence of their delight. Agni among all the five elements is the only one that always rises upwards. Psychologically Agni is the Force of Will (*iccha shakti*) which directs the thought flow towards the Supreme Light of the Divine, to enlightenment and liberation.

Hence those serious practitioners who are ever vigilant and mindful of the true nature of all things constantly contemplate the nature of the Self. They nurture their devotion like a pregnant women nurtures her foetus by taking the proper diet and practicing a good daily regime.

yataś codeti śūryo 'stam yatra ca gacchati |
taṁ devās sarve arpitās tad u nātyeti kaścana | etad vai tat || 9 ||

yataḥ ca = that from which; *udeti* = rises; *śuryaḥ* = the Sun; *yatra* = where; *astam gacchati* = sets, day after day; *taṁ* = on that (the Self); *devāḥ sarve* = all the gods; — fire in the divine context and speech in the personal context; *arpitāḥ* = are established, fixed; *tat u* = that indeed; *na kaḥ cana* = nobody whosoever; *ātyeti* = transcends = ceasing to be identified with It; *etat vai tat* = this verily is that.

9. Whence the sun rises and where it goes to rest; in it are all gods founded and no one ever goes beyond that. This verily, is that.

See Atharva Veda X. 18.16; BU. 1:5:23.

Commentary

Just as the Sun rises in the vastness of space, and sets in the same space in like manner the individual ātman arises from the Great Immensity known as Brahman, it derives its very existence from the Absolute and returns to the Absolute. All the ancient Vedic gods are recognised as expressions of the One Supreme Reality. The god Agni is the personification of the element fire in the Cosmos and speech in the individual. All the cosmic principles and forces have their essential existence in Brahman. Although for some time we may erroneously identify with our pyscho-physical vehicle and our personal limitations and conditioning, yet through the process of spiritual inquiry and investigation (*ātman-vicāra*) we strip away all conditioning and arrive at Self-realisation – beyond which we cannot go.

FAILURE TO COMPREHEND THE ESSENTIAL UNITY OF BEING IS THE CAUSE OF RE-BIRTH

yad eveha tad amutra yad amutra tad anviha |
mṛtyos sa mṛtyum āpnoti ya iha nāneva paśyati || 10 ||

yat eva iha = whatever is here; *tat* = that is; *amutra* = there; *yat* = whatever is; *amutra* = there; *tat anu iha* = likewise here; *mṛtyoḥ* = from death; *mṛtyum* = to death; *sa āpnoti* = he goes; *yaḥ* = who; *iha* = here; *nānā iva* = like seperativeness; *paśyati* = sees.

10. Whatever is here, that is there. Whatever is there, that too, is here. Whoever perceives anything like seperativeness here goes from death to death.

Commentary

A fundamental principle in Hindu metaphysics is "as above – so below" (*yathā brahmāṇḍa tathā piṇḍāṇḍa*). The human entity is nothing but a corelation of the universe. All powers in the human body and mind have their corelation in devas which rule the cosmos. All the chakras, the internal psychic centres have their corelative centres in the external universe. The Sun which is the source of light and energy for the external universe has it's corelation as the ātman within the individual. Even when examined from the atomic level we know that everything is inter-connected by space, all objects being merely differing densities of atoms. From a metaphysical perspective the interconnecting "space" is called Brahman, the differences that we perceive in the objective world are all temporary conformations of Karmic conditioning, when they, being conditioned by time, space and cause, dissolve what remains is the timeless, eternal, inscrutable Brahman alone.

Rāmānuja takes this verse as a confirmation of the omnipresence of Nārāyaṇa.

manasaivedam āptavyaṁ neha nānā 'sti kiñcana |
mṛtyos sa mṛtyuṁ gacchati ya iha nāneva paśyati || 11 ||

idam = this [Brahman] *āptavyatṁ* = is to be realised, obtained; *manasā eva* = through the mind indeed — through hearing the teachings from a teacher, reflecting and then realising; *iha* = here in this world; *nānā* = seperativeness; *kim-cana na asti* = not even the slightest exits; *saḥ* = that person; *yaḥ* = who; *iha nāna iva paśyati* = who sees seperativeness here; *mṛtyoḥ mṛtyuṁ gacchati* = goes from death to death.

11. By contemplation alone is this to be realised. There is no seperativeness here. Whoever perceives anything like seperativeness here, goes from death to death.

Commentary

In these two verses, the Supreme Brahman is declared to be homogenous and free from all difference. The multiplicity of the world does not touch the unity of the Supreme Brahman.

sarva-bhūtastham ātmānaṁ sarva-bhūtāni cātmani |
īkṣate yoga-yuktātmā sarvatra sama-darśanaḥ ||

Gita 6.29. With the mind harmonised by Yoga one sees equality everywhere; one sees one's Self as abiding in all beings and all beings in one's own Self.

THE ETERNAL LORD ABIDES IN ONE'S SELF

aṅguṣṭha-mātraḥ puruṣo madhya ātmani tiṣṭhati |
īśāno bhūta-bhavyasya na tato vijugupsate | etad vai tat || 12 ||

puruṣaḥ = That Being; *aṅguṣṭha-mātraḥ* = the size of a thumb; *tiṣṭhati* = exists, resides; *madhya ātmani* = in the body; *īśāna* = the Ruler; *bhūta-bhavyasya* = of the past and the future; *tataḥ* = thereafter [knowing which]; *na vijugupsate* = fears nothing; *etat vai tat* = this verily is that.

12. The person of the size of a thumb resides in the middle of the body. After knowing him who is the lord of the past and the future, one fears nothing (or - is disgusted by nothing). This, verily, is that.

Commentary

The ātma is said to reside within the Lotus of the Heart, the size of the interior of the heart is the thumb, therefore the "size" of the ātman is conditioned by the limits of the container. Just as the air in a section of bamboo is said to be of that particular size. The ātman in fact has no measurement as it is the smallest of the small and the greatest of the great.

The ātman is the Lord of the body and presides over the things of the past, those of the present and those of the future. This verse brings out the independent aspect of the Self and its empowerment to direct events.

aṅguṣṭha-mātraḥ puruṣo jyotir ivādhūmakaḥ |
īśāno bhūta-bhavyasya sa evādya sa u śvaḥ | etad vai tat || 13 ||

puruṣaḥ = That Being; *aṅguṣṭha-mātraḥ* = the size of a thumb;, *jyotiḥ iva* = like a flame; *adhūmakaḥ* = without smoke; *īśāna* = the Ruler; *bhūta-bhavyasya* = of the past and the future; *saḥ* = he; *eva* = indeed; *adya* = now, in all beings; *u* = and; *saḥ* = He will [exists]; *śvaḥ* = even tomorrow; *etat vai tat* = this verily is that.

13. The person of the size of a thumb is like a flame without smoke. He is the lord of the past and the future. He is the same today and the same tomorrow. This, verily is that.

Commentary

The lord of the past and the future is not a timeless Absolute but the ruler of the time order.
Shankara discusses this passage in his Sūtra Bhāṣya (1.3.24 and 25) and argues that the Self which is said to be of the size of a thumb is in reality Brahman. Rāmānuja and Nimbārka agree and hold that the highest self is called 'thumb-sized' since it dwells in the heart of the worshipper. In Br. Up. the Self is said to be 'as small as a grain of rice or barley and yet it is the ruler of all and lord of all,' V.5.1. In Ch.Up. it is said to be of the measure of a span, *pradeśa-mātra,* V.18.1. Maitri states all the views of the size of the Self. It tells us that one 'reaches the supreme state by meditating on the Self, which is smaller than an atom or else of the size of the thumb, or of a span, or of the whole body.' VI - 38.

THE RESULTS OF SEEING VARIETY AND UNITY

yathodakam durge vṛṣṭam parvateṣu vidhāvati |
evaṁ dharmān pṛthak paśyaṁs tān evānu-vidhāvati || 14 ||

yathā = just as; *udakam* = water; *vṛṣṭam* = pours down; *durge* = on an inaccessible place, on a height; *vidhāvati* = flows; *parvateṣu* = over hills, mountains; *evaṁ* = in this way; *paśyan* = viewing; *dharmān* = things; *pṛthak* = differently, seperately; *anuvidhāvati* = he runs after; *tān* = them; *eva* = only, even;

14. As water rained upon an inaccessible height flows down in various ways among the hills; so one who views things as seperate runs after them (distractedly).

Commentary

One who perceives the superficial differentiation of "dharmas" or conditioning factors of all things in the universe, ignoring the underlying unity of essence, is condemned to become a participant in the restless flowing that one perceives.

The various aspects of Paramātma such as being the *antaryāmi* of all manifested beings should be seen as diversity in unity and not seperate entities — Rāmānuja.

yathodakaṁ śuddhe śuddham āsiktaṁ tādṛg eva bhavati |
evaṁ muner vijānata ātmā bhavati gautama || 15 ||

yathā = just as; *śuddham* = pure; *udakam* = water; *śuddhe* = in pure; *āsiktaṁ* = poured; *bhavati* = becomes; *tādṛk eva* = of exactly the same quality; *evaṁ* = thus; *muneḥ* = the seer, one who meditates; *vijānata* = understanding; *ātmā* = the Self; *bhavati* = becomes; *gautama* = O Gautama.

15. As pure water poured into pure water remains the very same, so the Self, O Gautama, of the meditator who has understanding becomes (one with the Supreme).

Commentary

tādṛg eva = "the very same"; literally "just such". Shankara affirms that this means metaphysical identity between the individual Self and the Supreme Self. Rāmānuja and Nimbārka hold the view that the individual Self is non-different, i.e. not separate from the Supreme Self but that It never attains equality (*samānam*) with the Supreme. See MU. 3:2:8.

Vaḻḻi 5

THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

puram ekādaśa-dvāram ajasyā-vakra-cetasaḥ |
anuṣṭhāya na śocati vimuktaśca vimucyate | etad vai tat || 1 ||

puram = a city; *ekādaśa-dvāram* =possessed of 11 gates; *ajasya* = of the Birthless One; *avakra-cetasaḥ* = of the One whose knowledge is not crooked; *anuṣṭhāya* = ruling, guiding or meditating upon That; *na* = does not; *śocati* = grieve, experience sorrow; *vimuktaḥ ca* = and being freed; *vimucyate* = is liberated indeed; *etad vai tat* = this verily is that.

1. [There is] a city of eleven gates [belonging to] the unborn One, of uncrooked intelligence. By meditating upon it one does not grieve and being freed is freed indeed. This, verily is that.

Commentary

Here the body is compared to a city with eleven-gates. B.G. (V. 13) mentions nine gates, which are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, anus and generating organ – here two others are mentioned to make up eleven and they are the navel and the saggital suture, the opening at the top of the skull (A.U. 111. 12), through which the liberated jīva is said to escape at death. The body is compared to a city because in it we find an assemblage of civic functionaries such as; gatekeepers, soldiers, servants, citizens etc. A city is ruled over by an independent king who does not form a constituent part of the actual city itself.

"Whose thoughts are not crooked" = one whose consciousness is straight, constant and unchanging like the light of the sun.

The term *anuṣṭhāya* can mean "ruling" (the city) that is, the Higher Self rules the city of the body or it can mean "contemplating", meditating upon the owner of the city – the Self.

"Being freed is freed indeed" — When the Self controls the gates and lives in peace it is free from the bondage of desire and duty created by ignorance. It is freedom which begins here (*jivan-mukti*) producing freedom from suffering (*duhkha*) and leads after death to complete Liberation from Samsara (*videha-mukti*).

haguṁsaś śuciṣad vasur antarikṣasad hotā vediṣad atithir duroṇasat |
nṛṣad varasad ṛtasad vyomasad abjā gojā ṛtajā adrijā ṛtaṃ bṛhat || 2 ||

haṁsaḥ = a swan, the Supreme Mover (*ham* = to go); *śuci* + *sad* = a dweller in the pure place ie sky; *vasuḥ* = all pervader; *antarikṣa-sad* = a dweller in the intermediate region of the sky; *hotā* = the sacrificial fire or the priest; *vediṣat* = the dweller upon the sacrificial altar; *atithiḥ* = the guest; *duroṇasat* = that is within the drona vessel; *nṛṣat* =a dweller among humans; *varasat* = a dweller among among the gods; *ṛtasat* = a dweller in Truth or Cosmic Order; *vyomasat* = a dweller in space; *abjā* = born in the waters; *gojā* = born in the earth; *ṛtajā* = born of sacrifice; *adrijā* = born in the mountains (rivers etc); *ṛtam* = immutable in nature; *bṛhat* = the great.

2. He is the swan (Sun) in the sky, the pervader in the space (between earth and heaven), the priest at the altar, the guest in the sacrificial jar (house). He dwells in humans, in gods, in the Cosmic Order (Rta) and in the sky. He is (all that is) born of water, sprung from the earth, born of Cosmic Order, born of mountain. He is the true and the great.

Commentary

This is the *haṁsavatī mantra* whose seer is Vāma-deva is a prayer to the sun who illumines the world and dispels the darkness of ignorance.

In the Satapatha Brahmana, three forms of Agni are identified (1) the sun, (2) the air in space (being heating and producing friction. The air is also the source of lightening) and (3) with the sacrificial fire on earth. The sacred fire is also alternatively identified with the priest or the guest. In this verse, Agni, the Supreme Energy of creativity and illumination is identified with Brahman or the ātman. The verse affirms that the whole universe is non-different from the Supreme Brahman according to Shankara and according to Rāmānuja it affirms that all jīvas are pervaded by Paramātman.

"The guest in the sacrificial jar" can be interpreted to mean the stranger (*athithi*) who appears at one's gate uninvited and has the right to hospitality. Or it can also be taken to mean the Soma juice which is squezed out during the Vedic sacrifices and kept in the Drona jar.

Ṛta means the "Right"; the Eternal Cosmic Order, the Eternal Law = **Ṛta** on the Cosmic level is **Dharma** on the individual level. Ṛta is the immutable law of Nature by which the universe becomes ordered, systematized, integrated and avoids chaos and confusion. Ṛta also has an aesthetic value. Ṛta's chief function is to produce order and integration to matter but it also underlies the symmetry, harmony, splendour, and beauty of creation.

See RX. IV. 40. 5; Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā X. 24; XII- 14; Taittiriya Saṁhitā 111. 2. 10 . I; Satapatha Brāhmana VI. 7. 3.

ūrdhvaṃ prāṇaṃ unnayaty apānaṃ pratyag asyati |
madhye vāmanam, āsīnaṁ viśve devā upāsate || 3 ||

unnayati = he leads higher up; *ūrdhvam* = upward [from the heart chakra]; *prāṇam* = the expiration; *apānam* = the inspiration; *pratyak asyati* = thrusts forward; *vāmanam* = the adorable one or the Dwarf; *madhye āsīnaṁ* = seated in the middle; *viśve* = all; *devāḥ* = the gods; *upāsate* = worship.

3. Brahman leads the out-breath upward, he impels inwards the in-breath, the dwarf who is seated in the middle (of the lotus of the heart), all the gods adore.

Commentary

Originally *Prāṇa* meant 'breath' and was also used as a synonym for the Supreme Being. In the early Upanisads, all the vital powers (i.e. speech, breath, eye, ear and manas) are called *Prāṇas*. B.U. 1.5.3; T.U. 1.7. These are looked upon as variations in the cosmic life force called *Prāṇa*. In this verse *Prāṇa* refers to expiration and *Apāṇa* to inspiration.

viśvedevāḥ — "all the gods" Shankara interprets this to be – 'the senses and the vital powers' which are subject to the "person" or ātman within, who is their Lord whom they worship by their uninterrupted activity. Rāmānuja's opinion is that the term *viśvedevāḥ* refers to all those aspirants who are sattvik in nature.

asya visraṁsa-mānasya śarīrasthasya dehinaḥ |
dehād vimucyamānasya kim atra pariśiṣyate | etad vai tat || 4 ||

asya dehinaḥ śarīrasthasya = of this embodied one ie. the Self which is in the physical body; *visraṁsamānasya* = as it gets loosened or detached; *vimucyamānasya dehāt* = as it gets freed from the body; *kim* = what; *pariśiṣyate* = remains; *atra* = here; *etat vai tat* = this verily is That.

4. When the embodied self that dwells within the body slips off and is released from the body, what is there that remains? This, verily, is that.

Commentary

The meditator (*upāsaka*) upon the Paramātman has nothing more to do than to wait for the body, which is a product of karma to fall away.

What is there that remains? — This is a rhetorical question. The upāsaka no longer cares about the body, the Self takes with it the mind, memory and the impressions (*samskāras*) leaving behind only the organic matter of the physical body.

na prāṇena nāpāṇena martyo jīvati kaścana |
itareṇa tu jīvanti yasminn etāv upāśritau || 5 ||

na prāṇena na apāṇena = neither through the function of exhaling nor inhaling; *kaḥ cana martyaḥ* = [does] any mortal being; *jīvati* = live; *tu* = but; *itareṇa* = by another (something else); *jīvanti* = [do] they live; *yasmin* = that upon which; *etāu* = these two (inspiration and expiration); *upāśritau* = are dependant.

5. A mortal whosoever he may be, does not live by any outbreath or inbreath. But by another do they all live on which these (lifebreaths) both depend.

Commentary

This verse repudiates the materialist doctrine that the Self is just an assemblage of parts. The house and the dweller are separate; all the appliances and facility of the building exist for someone other than the building to utilise. The process of respiration and all the sensory and motor organs exist for something other than themselves to use — this something is the Self. The destruction of the house does not mean the destruction of the resident. The loss of the body does not mean the dissolution of the Self, but when the body is deserted by the Self the disintegration of the body takes place.

REBIRTH

hanta – ta idaṁ pravakṣyāmi guhyam brahma sanātanam |
yathā ca maraṇam prāpya ātmā bhavati gautama || 6 ||

hanta = well, now again; *gautama* = O Gautama; *te* = to you; *pravakṣyāmi* = I will relate, tell; *idaṁ* = this; *guhyam* = secret, mystery; *brahma sanātanam* = of the eternal Brahman; *maraṇam prāpya* = after having attained death; *yathā* = how; *ātmā* = the Self; *bhavati* = becomes, fares.

6. Well, O Gautama. I shall explain to you the mystery of Brahman, the eternal, and also how the Self fares, after the coming of death.

yonim anye prapadyante śarīratvāya dehinaḥ |
sthāṇum anye'nusamyanti yathā karma yathā śrutam || 7 ||

anye dehinaḥ = some Selves [after death]; *śarīratvāya* = in order to become embodied; *yonim prapadyante* = take refuge in wombs; *anye* = others; *anusamyanti* = follow, enter into; *sthāṇum* = the stationary things like plants etc; *yathā karma* = each in accordance with the deeds done; *yathā śrutam* = and in accordance with their knowledge, awareness.

7. Some Selves enter into a womb for embodiment; others enter stationary objects according to their deeds and according to their knowledge.

Commentary

The Upanishads consistently declare the independent reality of the Supreme Self (*Brahman*) but they also affirm the reality of the individual Self (*Jīva-ātman*). In this verse

Yama has encapsulated the Law of Karma. According to our deeds and our thought streams (*vāsanas*) we take birth after leaving the physical body. In the Gita Krishna declares that it is the last thought at the time of death (*antim smarana*) which determines our future rebirth.

The term *śrutam* means "that which is heard" and refers to our learning. Our thought streams are conditioned by what we have learned or heard from our social agents. Hence the emphasis on "hearing" what is beneficial. Interestingly enough the last faculty to go at the time of death is hearing — hence the need for chanting the Vishnu-sahasranama or some other sacred text at the time of dying.

ya eṣa supteṣu jāgarti kāmam kāmam puruṣo nirmimāṇaḥ |
tad eva śukraṁ tad brahma tad evāmṛtam ucyate |
tasmin lokāś śritās sarve tad u nātyeti kaścana | etad vai tat || 8 ||

yaḥ eṣaḥ = He who; *jāgarti* = remains awake; *supteṣu* = when the functions of the body sleep; *nirmimāṇaḥ* = shaping; *kāmam kāmam* = desire after desire; *puruṣaḥ* = the Person, Being; *tat eva* = that indeed is; *śukraṁ* = white, pure; *tat brahma* = that itself is Brahman; *tat eva ucyate* = that indeed is said to be; *amṛtam* = immortal, indestructable; *tasmin* = on it; *sarve lokāḥ śritāḥ* = all the worlds are fixed, have their support and existence; *na kaḥ cana* = no one; *tat u atyeti* = ever goes beyond That; *etat vai tat* = this verily is That.

8. That Being who is awake in those that sleep, shaping desire after desire, that, indeed is the pure. That is Brahman, that indeed is called the immortal. In it all the worlds are fixed and no one ever goes beyond it. This, verily, is That.

Commentary

Even when we sleep – either in the dream state or the dreamless state, the endless thought-flow in the mind continues but all of it is perceived by an ever vigilant awareness. This verse can also mean that all phenomena – both external and internal are due to the outpouring of the Brahman. Even dream consciousness is a proof of the existence of the self. See B.U. IV- 3.

THE INNER SELF IS BOTH IMMANENT & TRANSCENDENT

agnir yathaiko bhuvanaṁ praviṣṭo rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpo babhūva |
ekas tathā sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpo bahiś ca || 9 ||

yathā = just as; *agniḥ* = fire; *ekaḥ* = is one; *praviṣṭaḥ* = having entered; *bhuvanam* = this world; *rūpaṁ rūpaṁ* = in conformity with each form [of combustible material]; *prati rūpaḥ babhūva* = takes on that form; *tathā* = similarly; *sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā* = the Self that is in all beings; *ekaḥ* = though only one; *rūpaṁ rūpaṁ* = in conformity with each form [of physical body]; *prati rūpaḥ* = assumes that shape; *bahiḥ ca* = and yet it is outside [like space].

9. As fire which is one, entering this world becomes varied in shape according to the object (it burns), so also the one Self within all beings becomes varied according to whatever (it enters) and also exists outside (them all).

Commentary

This verse teaches the immanence as well as the transcendence of the Supreme Self — Śankara.

The idea that the Paramātman is the inner-self of all is taught again as it is very difficult to comprehend. The fire is present in all material things, in the same way the Paramātman pervades all entitites in his form of antaryāmin, he pervades them outside also — Rāmānuja.

bahiḥ: outside. While the Self assumes many forms, it is yet outside the manifested world in its own unmodified nature. Cp. R.V. where Indra, in his conflict with the demons, is said to have assumed many forms through his magic powers, becoming the counterform of every form.

vāyur-yathaiko bhuvanaṁ praviṣṭo rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpo babhūva |
ekas tathā sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā rūpaṁ rūpaṁ prati-rūpo bahiś ca || 10 ||

yathā = just as; *vāyuḥ* = air; *ekaḥ* = is one; *praviṣṭaḥ* = having entered; *bhuvanam* = this world; *rūpaṁ rūpaṁ* = in conformity with each form [it enters]; *prati rūpaḥ babhūva* = fills that form; *tathā* = similarly; *sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā* = the Self that is in all beings; *ekaḥ* = though only one; *rūpaṁ rūpaṁ* = in conformity with each form [of physical body]; *prati rūpaḥ* = assumes that shape; *bahiḥ ca* = and yet it is outside [like space].

10. As air which is one, entering this world becomes varied in shape according to the object (it fills), so also the one Self within all beings becomes varied according to whatever (it fills) and also exists outside (them all).

sūryo yathā sarva-lokasya cakṣur na lipyate cakṣuṣair bāhya-doṣaiḥ |
ekas tathā sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā na lipyate loka-duḥkena bāhyaḥ || 11 ||

yathā = just as; *sūryaḥ* = the Sun; *sarva-lokasya cakṣuḥ* = the eye of the entire universe; *na lipyate* = is not tainted or defiled; *cakṣuṣaiḥ bāhya-doṣaiḥ* = by the external faults seen by the eye such as physical dirt or ritual impurity; *tathā* = similarly; *ekaḥ* = though one; *sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā* = the Self within all beings; *na lipyate* = is not tainted; *loka-duḥkena* = by the suffering of the world; *bāhyaḥ* = as It (the Self) is beyond the world.

11. Just as the sun, the eye of the whole world, is not defiled by the external faults seen by the eye, even so, the One within all beings is not tainted by the sorrow of the world, as It is outside (the world).

Commentary

The verse admits the emprical reality of the suffering of the world but denies that it affects the Supreme Self which is our inner being; our essence. The forms of the universe which the Supreme assumes are not its modifications but are the manifestations of its possibilities. The Supreme Self is unaffected by the pain of the individual selves because the pain of the individual self is due to its identifying itself with its psycho-physical vehicle. The individual ego confuses the self (*ātman*) with what is not the self (*anātman*). The Supreme, on the other hand, does not suffer because it is not subject to ignorance (*avidya*) and it does not identify itself with any of the vagaries to which its various psycho-physical vehicles are subject. This is what is meant by it being "outside" – within the world yet beyond it.

eko vaśī sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā ekaṁ rūpam bahudhā yaḥ karoti |
tam ātmastham ye'nupaśyanti dhīrās teṣāṁ sukhaguṁ śāsvataṁ netareṣām || 12 ||

ekaḥ = the Supreme Reality is one; *vaśī* = the ruler or controller; *sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā* = the inner Self of all beings; *yaḥ* = he who; *karoti* = makes; *ekam* = one; *rūpam* = form; *bahudhā* = manifold; *tam ātmastham* = Him residing in the individual Self; *ye dhīra* = those wise persons who; *anupaśyanti* = perceive, realise; *teṣāṁ* = to them; *sukhaṁ śāśvataṁ* = eternal happinss; *na itareṣām* = not for others [who are non-discriminating].

12. There is one ruler, the Self within all things, who makes the one form manifold. The wise who perceive him within their Self, to them belongs eternal happiness, not to others.

Commentary

ātmastham: abiding in the Self. The Supreme Paramātman dwells in the inmost part of our being.

who makes the one form manifold. It is one in the unmanifested condition but becomes manifold in the manifested condition. It must be remembered that the Originator and the originated Universe are one and the same.

nityo'nityānāṁ cetanaś cetanānām eko bahūnāṁ yo vidadhāti kāmān |
tam ātmastham ye'nupaśyanti dhīrās teṣāṁ śāntiś śāśvatī netareśām || 13 ||

nityaḥ = the eternal; *anityānāṁ* = amongst the transient; impermanent; *cetanaḥ* = the conscious; *cetanānām* = amongst the conscious [all beings from Brahma downwards]; *ekaḥ* = the one; *bahūnām* = amid the many; *yaḥ* = who; *vidadhāti* = arranges diversely; *kāmān* = the desires, the desirable things; *tam ātmastham* = Him residing in the individual Self; *ye dhīra* = those wise persons who; *anupaśyanti* = perceive, realise; *teṣāṁ* = to them; *śāntiḥ śāśvatī* = eternal peace; *na itareṣām* = not for others [who are non-discriminating].

13. The one eternal amid the transient, the conscious amid the conscious, the one amid many, who grants their desires, to the wise who perceive Him as abiding in the Self, to them is eternal peace and to no others.

tad etad iti manyante'nirdeśyaṁ paramaṁ sukham |
kathaṁ nu tad vijānīyāṁ kim u bhāti vibhāti vā || 14 ||

tat = that [knowledge of the Self]; *anirdeśyam* = indescribable; *paramaṁ sukham* = of the nature of supreme bliss; *etat iti* = this is that; *manyante* = consider; *kathaṁ nu* = how indeed; *vijānīyām* = may I know it; *kim u tat bhāti* = does it shine of itself; *vibhāti vā* = or shine in reflection;

14. "This is that" and thus they recognise, the ineffable Supreme Bliss. How then may I come to know this? Does it illume (of itself) or is it illuminated (in reflection)?

Commentary

Even though the Supreme Bliss is declared to be indescribable and beyond the capacity of minds to comprehend still, the realised ones declare it to be "this" [something which can be doirectly known and realised] for the sake of conveying some direction, some goal for mortals to strive towards.

The question posed by the disciple is — "Does the Supreme Noumenon illume Itself or is It illuminated in It's expression? In other words can It be directly realised as It really is, or only through it's expressions in the phenomenal realm?

na tatra sūryo bhāti na candra-tārakaṁ nemā vidyuto bhānti kuto'yam agniḥ |
tam eva bhāntam anubhāti sarvaṁ tasya bhāsā sarvam idaṁ vibhāti || 15 ||

tatra = there [in Brahman which is one's own Self]; *sūryaḥ* = the Sun; *na bhāti* = does not shine; *na* = neither; *candra-tārakam* = the moon and stars; *imāḥ vidyutaḥ* = these flashes of lightening; *na bhānti* = do not shine; *kutaḥ ayam agniḥ* = how therefore, this fire [that is seen by us]; *sarvaṁ anubhāti* = everything that gives light or heat; *tam eva bhāntam* = That [Supreme being] indeed shines; *tasya* = through his; *bhāsā* = effulgence; *sarvam idaṁ vibhāti* = all this shines.

15. The sun illumines not there, nor the moon and the stars, these lightnings shine not, how then could this fire? Everything illuminates only after that illumination. His effulgence illumines all this world.

Commentary

The Supreme Being is the source of all light; the source of all knowledge and illumination, "the master light of all our seeing". It cannot be demonstrated or revealed by any earthly light. In other words it is impossible by any means known to us to reveal fully that supreme truth. It is that by which everything else is known. Just as the Sun illumines the entire world, and no other form of light can reveal the Sun — similarly the Supreme Light of Lights which illuminates even the Sun cannot be itself illuminated.

See M.U. 11. 2. 10; S.U. VI. IC The symbol of light as a metaphor for the Supreme Reality is the most natural and universal.

yadādityagataṁ tejo jagad bhāsayate'khilam ।
yaccandramasi yaccāgnau tat tejo viddhi māmakam ॥

That light that is in the sun which illumines the whole universe, and that which is in the moon and in fire, know that light to be Mine. Gītā 15:12

Ṣaṣṭhī Vaḷḷī

THE WORLD-TREE ROOTED IN BRAHMAN

ūrdhva-mūlo'vāk-śākha eso'śvatthas sanātanah ।
tad eva śukraṁ tad brahma tad evāmṛtam ucyate ।
tasmin lokāś śritās sarve tad u nātyeti kaścana । etad vai tat ॥ 1 ॥

esaḥ = this; *aśvatthaḥ* = sacred fig tree; *ūrdhva-mūlaḥ* = has its roots above; *avāk-śākhaḥ* = downwards are its branches; *sanātanaḥ* = eternal; *tat-eva* = that indeed is; *śukraṁ* = white, pure, resplendant; *tat brahma* = that is Brahman; *tat-eva* = that indeed is; *amṛtam* = immortal; *ucyate* = is called; *tasmin* = on That; *sarve lokāḥ* = all the realms of existence; *śritāḥ* = are fixed, based; *kaḥ-cana na* = nothing whatsoever; *atyeti* = exceeds, transcends; *tat-u* = that indeed; *etat-vai tat* = This verily is that.

1. With the root above and the branches below (stands) this eternal fig tree. That (indeed) is the pure; that is Brahman, that indeed, is called immortal. In it all the realms rest and nothing whatsoever transcends it. This, verily, is that.

Commentary

The tree of samsāra has its unseen roots in Brahman. The tree grows upside down. It has its roots above and branches below. The tree, roots and branches represent Brahman in its manifested form as the world of experience. While the tree of samsāra is said to be imperishable Brahman, the Gītā which uses this illustration, asks us to cut down the tree of existence by the potent weapon of non-attachment. XV. 1. 3. See S.U. 111. 9; Maitri VI.

Urdhva-mulam — that which has its roots above – the root that is the state of supreme Vishnu. This cosmic-tree comprising everything from the Unmanifested to the insentient material creation, has its root above – meaning in a more subtle dimension. It is called *vṛkṣa* (tree) because (of the root meaning) of being "felled". It consists of many forms of suffering, such as birth, growth, old age, death, disease, etc; it is in perpetual flux of change – no sooner is it seen than its nature is dissolved like a phantom, water in a mirage, a city in the sky, etc. and it ceases to exist ultimately like a tree; it is without any inner substance – like the stem of a plantain tree; it is subject to hundreds of doubts in the minds of sceptics and enquirers; its true essence cannot be determined through formulae

or dogma. Its essence lies in its root which is the supreme Brahman, revealed through the teachings of Vedānta. This cosmic tree grows from out of the seed of ignorance, desire, action planted in the unmanifested; its sprout is Hiranyagarbha – the collective jivas; its trunk is the diverse subtle bodies of all creatures; its vigour of growth results from the sprinkling of the water of desire; its tender sprouts are the objects of the senses of knowledge; its leaves are the Vedas, the Smrtis, logic, learning, and instruction; its lovely flowers are the many deeds such as sacrifice, charity, austerity, etc.; its various tastes are the experience of happiness and sorrow; its infinite fruits are the means of subsistence of beings; it has its secondary roots well developed, entwined, and firmly fed through the sprinkling of the water of desire (for those fruits); its nests are the seven realms, built by the birds which are the living beings from Brahma downwards; its tumultous sounds are produced by the cries of mirth and lamentations of grief arising from the enjoyment and suffering of living beings; and it is felled by the axe of non-attachment consisting of the realisation of the identity of Brahman and the Self as inclucated by Vedanta. This tree of the world is an *aśvattha* – its nature is ever unsteady, like the leaves of the peepul tree, which are constantly trembling in the breeze – our universe too is constantly being shaken as it were – by the winds of desire and our attempts to satisfy those desires.

THE GREAT FEAR

yad idaṁ kiñca jagat sarvaṁ prāna ejati niḥsṛtam ।
mahad bhayaṁ vajram udyataṁ ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti ॥ 2 ॥

prāne (*sati*), = the supreme Brahman, (being there); *yat idaṁ kiñca jagat sarvam* = all this universe that there is; *niḥśṛtam* (*sat*), = having emerged; *ejati* = and moves or acts; [That Brahman which is thus the cause of the origination etc; is] *mahat bhayam* = greatly terrifying; *vajram udyatam* = like an upraised thunderbolt; *ya etat viduḥ* = they who know this; *amṛtas te bhavanti* = they attain immortality.

2. All this universe, whatever here exists, emerges from and moves in prāṇa (Brahman). (It is) the great fear (like) the upraised thunderbolt. They that know that become immortal.

Commentary

Brahman, being the ground source from which everything conceivable arises – even the very vital force (*prāṇa*) of the cosmos, is figuratively referred to by the word *Prāṇa*. The source and sustaining power of the universe is Brahman. Evolution is not a mechanical process. It is controlled by Brahman, who is here represented as *prāṇa*, the life-giving power.

This verse stresses dramatically that there is a controlling intelligence behind the phenomenal universe. The third law of thermodynamics is the law of entropy – if left alone all closed systems result in chaos. Yet in fact we see that chaos does not happen, there is definite order in the universe and it is because of Brahman cosmic order exists.

The idea imparted is that just as servants, finding their master in front with an uplifted thunderbolt methodically follow his command, similarly every system in the universe consisting of the movements of the planets etc; continues methodically without a moment's respite because there is a Supreme Intelligence who ordains it so.

bhayād asya agnis tapati bhayāt tapati sūryaḥ ।
bhayād indraś ca vāyuś ca mṛtyur dhāvati pañcamaḥ ॥ 3 ॥

asya bhayāt = from fear of Him; *agniḥ tapati* = the fire burns; *bhayāt* = from fear; *sūryaḥ tapati* = the Sun gives heat; *bhayāt* = from fear; *indraḥ ca vāyuḥ* = Indra and Vayu; *mṛtyuḥ ca* = and Death; *pañcamaḥ* = the fifth; *dhāvati* = run, speed, move fast.

3. Through fear of him, fire burns; through fear (of him) the sun gives heat; through fear both Indra (the lord of the gods) and wind and Death, the fifth, speed on their way.

Commentary

Here we have a graphic description of a profound psychological fact – very few people spontaneously do their duty without some motivating factor. Just as students will study because of the fear of the teacher, or parents, or the fear of failure, so each and every functionary in the universe acts through fear of something – either authority, sanctions, personal failure, disgrace etc. Negative pursuasion is seems is a greater motivator than positive reward.

bhīṣā'smād-vātaḥ pavate | bhīṣodeti sūryaḥ | bhīṣā'smād-agniścendraśca |
mṛtyur-dhāvati pañcama iti || T.U. 11. 8. 1.

PERCEPTION OF THE SELF

iha ced aśakad boddhuṁ prāk śarīrasya visrasaḥ |
tatas sarveṣu lokeṣu śarīratvāya kalpate || 4 ||

cet = if; *aśakat* = one succeeds; *boddhum* = in knowing, realising; *iha* = here and now; *prāk śarīrasya visrasaḥ* = before the disintegration of the body. [if one does not succeed] *tataḥ* = then – because of that non-realisation; *sarveṣu lokeṣu* = in the manifested or projected worlds of existence; *śarīratvāya* = for embodiment; *kalpate* = one is considered suitable or fit.

4. If One is able to realise (Him) before the body falls away [one would be freed from suffering]; [if not] one becomes fit for embodiment in the worlds of being.

Commentary

Some texts read *svargeṣu lokeṣu* in the second line which means "in the the heavenly realms". If this is accepted the verse would mean:=

"If one is able to realise that Brahman before death one becomes fit for rebirth in the heavenly realms".

Śaṅkara opines that that this verse teaches that it is possible for us to attain the saving wisdom here and now – a state known as *jivan-mukti* as opposed to liberation after death – *videha mukti*. The difference is only from the perspective of the observer not from that of the liberated one.

Rāmānuja does not accept the idea of jīvan-mukti because the body is due to Karma and will last as long as the Karma is operative. True mukti can only apply to the jīva which is completely liberated from a body and Karma.

yathā''darśe tathā''tmani yathā svapne tathā pitṛ-loke |
yathā'psu parīva dadṛśe tathā gandharva-loke chāyā-tapayor iva brahma-loke || 5 ||

yathā = as; *ādarśe* = in a mirror; *tathā-ātmani* = similarly in the self (intellect); *yathā svapne* = as in a dream; *tathā pitṛ-loke* = similarly in the realm of the ancestors; *yathā apsu* = as [a reflection] in water; *pari iva dadṛśe* = appears to be without clear demarcation; hazy; *tathā gandharva-loke* = similarly in the realm of the Gandharvas; *chāyā-tapayoḥ iva* = like shade and light; *brahma-loke* = in the realm of Brahma.

5. As in a mirror, so [is Brahman seen] in one's self, as in a dream – so in the world of the ancestors; as [an object] is seen [reflected] in water – so in the world of the gandharvas; as shade and light in the world of Brahma.

Commentary

The Supreme Essence can be seen reflected in the mind which is like a mirror – covered with dust. If the mind is made pure and clear through the removal of the mental dirt – selfish desire, anger and greed then the true nature of Brahman is realised.

Rāmānuja interprets the clause *yathā'darśe* as meaning "as a new moon night — in which things are not clearly seen".

In the region of the departed ancestors who are still entangled in the enjoyment of merit, Brahman can be seen only as an indistinct reminiscence, as a remembrance of dreams. Also in the higher world of the Gandharvas – beings who live in the fathomless spaces of air, Brahman can be seen like a shimmering reflection in trembling waters. Only in the highest of the samsāric realms – the world of Brahmā can he be seen clearly as shade and light – but this realm is extremely hard to reach entailing the severe practice of meditation and rites. Therefore one should make effort here and now to realise the Self.

This verse stresses the great value of a human birth – so hard to obtain. The purpose of life is to realise Brahman, the way to that end is to purify the mind so that it appears like a polished mirror – reflecting all things but not becoming itself tainted by what it reflects.

RV. VIII. 65. 5; see also B.U. IV. 3. 33.

THE SELF/BODY DICHOTOMY

indriyāṇām pṛthag-bhāvam udayāstamayau ca yat |
pṛthag utpadyamānānam matvā dhīro na śocati || 6 ||

indriyāṇām = of the senses – hearing, sight etc; *pṛthak utpadyamānānam* = that are generated sepertely from their sources in the various subtle elements like space etc; *matvā* = knowing through the process of discrimination; *pṛthak bhāvam* = their separate natures dissimilar to the ātman; *ca yat* = and that; *udayāstamayau* = rising and setting; *dhīraḥ* = the wise, intelligent person; *na śocati* = does not grieve or experience suffering.

6. Knowing the separate nature of the senses, which originate separately (from the various subtle elements) and (knowing also) that their rising and setting (are separate), the wise one does not grieve.

Commentary

The discrimination between the cognising Self and the mind-sense organism is declared. When the wise person knows full well that the material senses do not arise from the Self, that their rising and setting in relation to the waking and sleeping states belong to their own material nature, then one is freed from suffering. Suffering arises from the misidentification with the activities of the mind-body.

indriyebhyaḥ param mano manasas sattvam uttamam |
sattvād adhi mahān ātmā mahato'vyaktam uttamam || 7 ||

indriyebhyaḥ param manaḥ = the mind is superior to the senses; *manasas sattvam uttamam* = the "essence of the mind" is better than the mind; *sattvāt adhi mahān ātma* = higher than the intellect is the Mahat or "great self"; *mahataḥ avyaktam uttamam* = the unmanifest is superior to the "great self".

7. The mind is superior to the sense-organs; above the mind is its essence (intelligence); beyond the intelligence is the great Self (*jīvātma*); beyond the great (self) is the unmanifest (*antaryāmi*).

See notes on 1. 3. 10 and 11.

avyaktāt tu paraḥ puruṣo vyāpako'liṅga eva ca |
yaṁ jñātva mucyate jantur amṛtatvaṁ ca gacchati || 8 ||

avyaktāt tu paraḥ puruṣaḥ = the Purusha is superior to the unmanifest; *vyāpakaḥ* = He is all-pervasive; *aliṅgaḥ* = having no identifying sign; *eva ca* = indeed (emphasis); *yaṁ jñātva* = having known whom; *jantuḥ* = a person; *mucyate* = is liberated from all bonds [of ignorance]; *gacchati amṛtatvaṁ ca* = attains immortality as well.

8. Beyond the unmanifest is the Purusha, all-pervading and without any identifying mark whatever. By knowing whom, a person is liberated and achieves deathlessness.

Commentary

The analysis of the ontological universal principles culminates in Brahman described here as the "Puruṣa". Puruṣa is translated by some commentators as "The Supreme Person" in order to emphasis the personal aspect as opposed to the impersonal and the need to surrender to Him; but this is its secondary meaning. The primary meaning is "that which fills", this is supported by the adjective which follows "all-pervading".

without any identifying mark. [*alinga*]: See M.U. 111. 2. 4; Maitri V. 31, 35; vii; 2. 'Without any empirical attributes.' **Linga** is a distinctive mark or sign. In logic, it is an invariable sign which constitutes the basis of inference. There what is meant is there is nothing which our minds can conceive of which would be a starting point for infering anything of Brahman. *Linga* can also refer to the "subtle body" (*linga śarīra* = *sūkṣma śarīra*) the entity consisting of intellect, ego, manas, senses, and the subtle elements. S.U. VI. 9; Maitri VI. 10. 19. If *linga* is taken in this sense, it means that the Supreme Being needs no subtle body as it is not subject to death and re-birth.

na sandṛśe tiṣṭhati rūpam asya na cakṣuṣā paśyati kaścan-ainam |
hṛdā manīṣā manasā'bhiklṛpto ya etad vidur amṛtās te bhavanti || 9 ||

asya rūpam = His [Brahman's or the Atman's] form; *na tiṣṭhati* = does not exist; *saṁdṛśe* = as an object of vision or perception; *na kaḥ cana* = nobody; *paśyati* = perceives; *enam* = this {Self or Brahman] *cakṣuṣā* = with the physical eye or the other senses; *hṛdā* = by the heart; *manīṣā* = by the intellect, intuitive vision; *manasā* = by mind; *abhiklṛptaḥ* = when it is revealed or apprehended; *ya etat viduḥ* = those who know this fact; *te* = they; *amṛtāḥ bhavanti* = become deathless.

9. Not within the field of vision stands this form. No one soever sees Him with the eye. By heart, by intuitive thought, by mind apprehended, they who know Him become immortal.

Commentary

The first half of this verse points out that we cannot form a visual image of the Supreme Being and the second half urges that we can still apprehend Him to a certain degree by the heart, by intuitive thought and by deep reflection. The Supreme Reality is to be realised through the concentrated direction of all mental powers within the depth of one's own being.

By mind = does not mean that we can intellectually conceptualise the Supreme Being but by applying the mind to meditation, true insight will eventually arise in a mind purified from all the dross which hinders the direct perception of the ātman. When the mind becomes clear and the heart pure, God-vision arises. We must seek God in our hearts and our Selves. The process is called introversion — the solitary communing of the Self with God, the thought of the alone to the Alone, as Plotinus described it.

Apprehended = (*abhiklṛptaḥ*) As the concept of God is formed by our personal subjective mental nature, it cannot be identical for all. As is our nature so is our conception of the Divine. This attitude develops charity, open-mindedness, disinclination to force one's views on other people's attention. The Hindu does not feel that he belongs to a chosen race and is thus relatively free from a provincial, ethnocentric self-righteousness — this attitude is due to the recognition that the concepts of God that we entertain are relative to our own traditions and training and our *svabhāva* — personality.

yadā pañcāvatiṣṭhante jñānāni manasā saha |
buddhiś ca na viceṣṭate tām āhuḥ paramām gatim || 10 ||

yadā = when; *pañca jñānāni* = the five sources of knowledge eyes etc; *manasā saha* = together with the mind which collates the data they gather; *avatiṣṭhante* = are at rest, have ceased to fluctuate; *ca buddhiḥ* = and also the intellect characterised by determination; *na viceṣṭate*= does not engage in activites; *tām* = that state [of quiescence]; *āhuḥ* = is called; *paramām gatim* = the highest state.

10. When the five cognitive senses together with the mind cease (from their normal activities) and the intellect itself does not stir, that, they say, is the highest state.

Commentary

The Yoga sūtras of Patañjali begin with the definition of Yoga as "the stilling of the fluctations of the mind — the perceiver then abides in his true essence". Once the turbulence of the mind has ceased through the practice of meditation, one then realises one's true nature. In spiritual practice there is nothing to "achieve" or gain — there is only the need to remove the mental turbulence and the afflictive emotions which cloud the true vision of the Self.

The Highest State (*paramām gatim*) — is also refered to as *vaikuṇṭha* – "the state free from all hindrances". Usually described as a mythological realm of superlative bliss in the company of Lord Viṣṇu – but here in philosophical terms is declared to be a state of pure awareness of the Self.

Rāmānuja takes the "highest state" here to refer to the quelling of the mind from all sensual pre-occupation prior to the ultimate pursuit of the path to Mokṣa.

tām yogam iti manyante sthirām indriya-dhāraṇām |
apramattas tadā bhavati yogo hi prabhavāp-yayau || 11 ||

tām = that state; *sthirām indriya-dhāranam* = the steady control of the 10 senses; *iti* = this; *manyante* = they consider; *yogam* = to be Yoga; *bhavati* = one becomes; *apramattaḥ* = undistracted; with careful concentration; *tadā* = then, at the time of yoga practice; *yogaḥ hi prabhavā apyayau* = expands and contracts, subject to growth and decay.

11. This, the steady control of the senses is considered to be Yoga. Then one becomes undistracted for Yoga comes and goes.

Commentary

Yoga is sometimes defined as "union" but here it is in fact "disjunction" since it is the state of severance with all negativity and suffering and the abiding in one's own pristine essential nature. According to Rāmānuja *Yoga* is the means of attainment of the desirable and the avoidance of the undesirable.

apramattaḥ: undistracted. In Buddhism all virtues are said to be centred in *apramada* (Pali *appamido*). Keenness of attention or "mindfullness" is the way of immortality and slackness the way of repeated death.

appamādo amata-padam, pamādo maccuno padam. (Dhamma Pada 21)

prabhavāpyayau: comes and goes. The mind is by default unsteady and prone to wander. Vigilant mindfullness is necessary in meditation practice, as the state of "yoga" – control of the senses is not a naturally steady state in the undeveloped mind – it fluctuates. If we are careful we will acquire it; if we are careless we will lose it.

THE SELF AS EXISTENT

naiva vācā na manasā prāptuṁ śakyo na cakṣusā |
astīti bruvato'nyatra kathaṁ tad upalabhyate || 12 ||

na eva = not even; *vācā* = by speech; *na manasā* = neither by thinking; *na cakṣusā* = neither by seeing; *śakyaḥ* = can [It]; *prāptuṁ* = be apprehended; *kathaṁ* = how; *tat* = that; *upalabhyate* = can be attained, comprehended; *anyatra* = except; *asti iti bruvataḥ* = by one who says "It is".

12. Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight can It be apprehended. How can It be comprehended except by one who says, 'It is'?

Commentary

The infinite ultimate reality cannot be grasped through the means of the finite senses; those who know do not engage in flowery descriptions and speculations but simply affirm that 'It is.'

The individual consists of Self, mind and body – the mind being that which channels impressions from the external world to the Self and the consciousness of the Self to the external world. The Self as the knowing subject can never become an object of knowledge – hence all talk of "searching for a Self" is meaningless – since any act of investigation requires a subject and an object. The Self can be realised through the discipline of Yoga which culminates in meditation. While the Self indeed transcends the ordinary means of apprehension, It can be immediately experienced through Yoga (meditation), and for such apprehension to take place, faith in It's existence is an indispensable precondition. The conviction of the reality of that which is sought is essential for any meaningful practice of Yoga. Hence at the out set of his Yoga Sutras Patanjali declares the existence of the Self.

1:3 The perceiver then abides in its essence.

Commenting on this verse, Shankara argues that the Supreme Brahman who is conceived as the source of the universe must of logical necessity be regarded as existent. We cannot conceive of a complex universe as produced from nothing (*ex nihilo*). The world effect must have an existent cause; what it is, is impossible to conject or speculate – all one can truly say is "It is".

Rāmānuja understands – *asti iti bruvataḥ* (by one who says, 'It is') – to be refering to the Vedas i.e. Upaniṣads as the only valid source of confirmation of the existence of Brahman etc.

astīty evopalabdhavyas tattva-bhāvena cobhayoḥ |
astīty evopalabdhasya tattva-bhāvaḥ prasīdati || 13 ||

asti iti eva upalabdhavyaḥ = It should be apprehended as simply existent then; *tattva-bhāvena* = its true nature [is realised] *ubhayoḥ* = of the two aspects, conditioned and unconditioned, immanent and transcendent; *tattva-bhāvaḥ* = the true essential aspect; *asti iti eva upalabdhasya* = of that very self which was earlier accepted as immanent; *prasīdati* = becomes favourably disposed for Self-revelation.

13. It should be apprehended only as existent [conditioned] and then [realised] as It really is [unconditioned]. Of these two aspects, the real nature of the Self that has been known as merely existing becomes favourably disposed.

Commentary

The early stage of our spiritual evolution begins with the primary rational assertion that the "Self/Brahman exists" after deep study of the Vedānta, without any further speculation about Its nature. Rational conviction in the existence of ātman/Brahman then leads in some, to the practice of meditation and eventually to personal spiritual experience in which Its true essence is revealed to, and apprehended by the yogi.

In this section, the author speaks to us of the discipline of Yoga by which one's whole being is unified and concentrated on the realization of the highest Being – which is also the inner and real Self of the individual.

yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā ye'sya hṛdi śritāḥ |
atha martyo'mṛto bhavaty atra brahma samaśnute || 14 ||

yadā = when; *sarve* = all; *kāmā* = desires; *pramucyante* = fall off, are shed, liberated; *ye* = which; *hṛdi śritāh* = nestle within the heart i.e. the intellect; *asya* = of the one pre-enlightenment; *atha* = then; *martyaḥ* = a mortal; *amrtaḥ bhavati* = becomes immortal; *atra* = here itself; *brahma samaśnute* = attains the state of Brahman.

14. When all desires which nestle within the heart are fall away, then a mortal becomes immortal and even here attains Brahman.

Commentary

When the obstructing poisons of the mind such as self-referent desire, anger, ignorance and doubt disappear, the vision of Truth is attained. The consummation of spirituality is the experience of the "state of Brahman" which is the expanded awareness of Divinity pervading the entire universe – a state of superlative joy here and now.

The second of the Buddha's noble truths is the causal connection between desire and suffering. Freedom from hankering and its companion clinging or grasping is the foundation of joy and contentment here and now.

Rāmānuja says that the desires refered to here are only hankering for those things which obstruct the path to mokṣa — *durviṣaya vaṣayaka manorathāḥ*

yadā sarve prabhidyante hṛdayasyeha granthayaḥ |
atha martyo' mṛto bhavaty etāvadhy anuśāsanam || 15 ||

yadā = when; *sarve granthayaḥ* = all the knots; *hṛdayasya* = of the heart – intellect; *iha* = here and now; *prabhidyante* = are shattered, destroyed; *atha* = then; *martyaḥ* = a mortal; *amrtaḥ bhavati* = becomes immortal; *etāvat* = thus far, this much; *anuśāsanam* = the teaching.

15. When all the knots that fetter the heart are cut asunder, then a mortal becomes immortal. Thus far is the teaching.

Commentary

The knots of the heart are all the conditioned concepts arising from ignorance (*avidya*) which bind one to the wheel of samsara. These concepts are all the notions of identity (*ahaṅkāra*), the delusion of possession (*mamata*), attraction (*rāga*), aversion (*dveṣa*), clinging (*abhiniveśa*), etc.

Thus far is the teaching. — The original Upanisad, it was felt, ended with I.1.17. The subsequent sections may have been added at a late date. These words seem to mark the end of the enlarged Upanisad. The remaining verses seem to be a still later addition.

śataṁ caikā ca hṛdayasya nāḍyas tāsām mūrdhānam abhiniḥsṛtaikā |

tayordhvam āyann amṛtatvam eti viṣvaṅg anyā utkramaṇe bhavanti || 16 ||

hṛdayasya nāḍyaḥ = the subtle psychic channels that are centred in the heart chakra; *śataṁ* = one hundred; *ca eka* = and one - being the sushumna nadi; *tāsām* = of these; *eka* = one; *abhiniḥsṛtā* = exists through; *mūrdhānam* = the head; *tayā* = through that channel; *ūrdhvam āyan* = going upwards (along the path of the sun); *amṛtatvam eti* = one goes to immortality; *viṣvak anyāḥ* = the other channels that branch out in different directions; *utkramaṇe bhavanti* = serve for death ie. rebirth.

16. A hundred and one are the nadis of the heart [chakra]; one of them [*sushmuna*] leads up to the crown of the head [*sahasrāra chakra*]. Going upward through that, one becomes immortal; the other [channels] going in various directions lead to repeated rebirth.

Commentary

See C.U. VIII. 6. 6, where it is said, that if a peson has lived the disciplined life of a student and so 'found the self,' then at the time of death, the consciousness, dwelling in the heart, will pass upward by the psychic channel known as sushumna (Maitri VI. 21), to an aperture in the crown of the skull known as the *brahma-randhra* or *vidhrti*, by which at the beginning of life it first entered the mind/body complex. From there the Self rises by the sun's rays to the sun which is a door-way to the Brahma world to those who are enlightened and a stopping-place for those who do not know. The other ways lead the unliberated to re-embodiment.

*one becomes immortal***;** According to Vishnu Purana II:8:97 Brahma-loka which lasts till the great dissolution of the universe is called “immortality” – this is the secondary meaning of the word. True “immortality” means freedom from the cycle of birth and death in other words – liberation from the cycle of samsāra.

Therefore the meaning can be that the enlightened one who dies with the mind focussed in the heart chakra ascends to the sahasrara chakra and then into the Brahma-loka or realm of Brahmā. There one remains until the great dissolution and is then reborn with the next cycle of projection.

Or on the other hand it can mean that after remaining in Brahmā-loka until the end of the cycle one then attains true immortality.

aṅguṣṭha mātraḥ puruṣo'ntarātmā sadā janānām hṛdaye sanniviṣṭaḥ |
taṁ svāc charīrāt pravṛhen muñjād iveṣīkāṁ dhairyeṇa |
taṁ vidyāc chukram amṛtaṁ taṁ vidyāc chukram amṛtam iti || 17 ||

aṅguṣtha mātraḥ puruṣaḥ = the Person the size of a thumb; *antarātmā* = witin one's very own Self; *sadā* = always; *janānām hṛdaye sanniviṣṭaḥ* = seated in the hearts of all people; *taṁ* = him; *pravṛhet* = one should draw out, separate; *svāt śarīrāt* = from one's own body; *iṣīkāṁ iva muñjāt* = like a stalk from within the munja grass; *dhairyeṇa* = unerringly, steadily; *taṁ* = that separated consciousness; *vidyāt* = one should know; *śukram amṛtaṁ* = as pure and immortal; *taṁ vidyāt śukram amṛtam iti* = the repetion indicates the end of the teaching.

17. The person of the size of a thumb, the inner Self, abides always in the hearts of all people. Him one should draw out unerringly, from the body, as (one may do) the stalk from the reed. Him one should know as the pure, the immortal, yea, Him one should know as the pure, the immortal.

Commentary

Unerringly = (*dhairyena*) according to Shankara with mindfulness, (*apramadena*) with courage. According to Rāmānuja with intellectual skill. (jñāna-kauśalena)

Here Yama emphasizes the teaching that one must realise the Self as essentially pure and not subjected to death and rebirth, and understand its difference from the psycho-physical vehicle which is the opposite – impure and subjected to repeated birth and death.

mṛtyu-proktāṁ nāciketo'tha labdhvā vidyām etām yoga vidhiṁ ca kṛtsnam ।
brahma-prāpto virajo 'bhūd vimṛtyur anyo'py evam yo vid adhyātmam eva ॥ 18 ॥

naciketas atha labdhvā = Nachiketas then having obtained; *vidyām etām mṛtyu-proktāṁ* = this Knowledge of Brahman imparted by Yama; *ca kṛtsnam yoga vidhiṁ* = and the methodology of Yoga in its entirety; *brahma-prāptaḥ abhūt* = attained the state of brahman-realisation; *viraja* = free from rajas; *vimṛtyuḥ* = free from death; *anya api* = and anyone else too; *evam yah vit* = who realise this; *adhyātmam eva* = with regard to Spirituality.

18. Then Naciketas, having gained this knowledge declared by Death and the whole teaching of Yoga, attained Brahman and became freed from passion and from death. And so may any other who knows this in regard to Spirituality.

Commentary

Free from passion and death (virajaḥ & vimṛtyuḥ) = Shankara interprets *vi-rajah* (free of rajas) as freedom from both virtue (*puṇya*) and vice (*pāpa*) and *vi-mrtyuḥ* (free from death) as freedom from desire and ignorance.

This final verse is called the *"phala-sruti*" enunciation of the benefits of this teaching which are transcendence and final liberation from samsāra. It stresses the fact that enyone and everyone is able to achieve this state regardless of any race, caste, creed, gender or any other difference. The spiritual path is open to one and all, the gates of liberation have been flung open wide by Lord Yama so that all who heed this teaching can enter.

saha-nāvavatu । saha nau bhunaktu ।

saha vīryaṃ karavāvahai । tejasvi-nāvadhītam astu mā vidviṣāvahai ॥

oṃ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ ॥